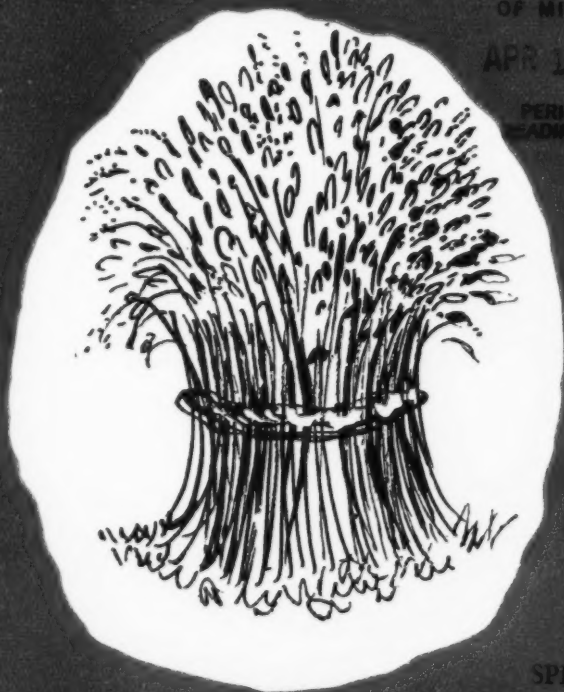


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THE CORNHILL



No. 1019

Spring 1959

MAGAZINE

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JOHN MURRAY, 50 ALBEMARLE STREET, LONDON, W.1

At present the CORNHILL appears quarterly and will publish occasional Supplements containing work of up to 35,000 words in length.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

MICHAEL CARROLL spent his childhood in India. After leaving Cambridge, he did an extensive tour by Land Rover, donkey and other forms of conveyance through Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, India and Nepal. His book, *Notes from a Persian Tea-house*, is nearly completed.

JOHN PLAYFAIR is a doctor. He started writing two years ago. His first novel *Pursued by a Bear* was published by Duckworth. *Andiamo!*, his second book, which has an Italian background, is appearing in May.

SIR ROY HARROD. Fellow of the British Academy, Tutor in Economics at Christ Church, joint Editor of *The Economic Journal*, served on Sir Winston Churchill's private statistical staff during the Second World War. Among his books are *International Economics*, *Towards a Dynamic Economy*, *Life of J. M. Keynes*, *The Dollar*, *Foundation of Inductive Logic*, *Policy Against Inflation*.

FRANCIS WOODBURN LEARY, writer and historian, was born in New York and was an editor there before emigrating to Europe. He worked at the Paris headquarters of E.C.A., Information Division. Among his books are *The Dark Monarchy* (Evans), *The Swan and The Rose* (A. A. Wyn), *Fire and Morning* (Putnam). He is now completing biographical studies of the fifteenth century entitled *The Golden Longing*, to be published by John Murray and Scribner.

ELIZABETH BERRIDGE. Novelist, short-story writer, critic, and editor. Since moving from Wales to London she has written comparatively little, other than occasional programmes for sound and television. Among her novels are *The House of Defence* (Falcon Press) and *Upon Several Occasions* (Heinemann). She is working on another book.

We apologise for the fact that in our last issue GORDON SHEPHERD'S book, *The Austrian Odyssey*, was accredited to Collins, whereas it is of course published by Macmillan.

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of mixed British and Italian parentage. With plenty of unexpected catastrophes, plenty of odd characters, and a long holiday episode in Italy to diversify the London scene, this new book has all the youthful gaiety and intellectual sparkle of his first novel, and improves on it with a closer knit story and a more coherent philosophy. Music is again a central preoccupation, and the book's climax is at a Covent Garden performance of *Traviata*. To be published in May at 15/-.

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A Journey to Isfahan

BY MICHAEL CARROLL

THERE is still something left of the old caravanserai romance, even in a bus-station. For in Persia it seems that only the method of travelling has changed : camels to motor-buses ; to the Persian the spirit of the journey has remained the same.

Stand and watch in the corner of one of these bus-stations, in the evening, before the buses leave. Perhaps there will be a minaret, darkly pointing across the still bright sky, a new moon balancing upon its topmost balcony. Below in the half darkness of the yard there is all noise and confusion. The place is thronged with people talking and arguing, jostling round the heaps of luggage, round the waiting buses. They stand patiently these buses, monstrous coaches of tin and wood, painted the gayest colours that a Persian eye can demand : striped along each flank with crimson and green, turquoise and yellow, with the occasional rose of garish pink dropped as it were from heaven upon the bonnet. Men crawl like flies over them, hauling boxes, bales of cloth and carpets up the ladders, cursing the skull-capped porters who struggle bowed under their loads through the press of people. Mechanics half hidden inside the bonnets make a last doubtful survey of the engines, tighten the last screws. Commands, counter-commands, expostulations . . . Stand back ! someone is brandishing a starting-handle . . . Voices are suddenly deafened by the first roar of the untried cylinders.

The beggars have turned out in strength, discreetly advertising their deformities. They stumble painfully among the crowd with arms outstretched, clinking handfuls of small coin, muttering their thanks to Allah for the alms received. Turbans and caps brush strangely together, long coats and flapping trousers with shabby western suits ; curled embroidered slippers knock delicately against cheap black shoes. In the corners huddle the women, blue-shawled and shrinking,

A Journey to Isfahan

only their eyes made bold by their inviolability. Especially attentive to them is the seller of charms and amulets, hideously illuminated Koranic texts . . . Buy one, or two, and you will be safe from the jinns of the desert, those malignant spirits always on the look-out to bewitch the unwary traveller. But doubtless you have already taken the necessary precautions.

One would think that the whole town was about to leave tonight. But for every traveller there is at least a half-dozen come to see him off; and besides, everyone is here to share the excitement. Those who are really going are easy to pick out. They pretend to shake off the endearments and encouragements of friends and relatives impatiently, as if to say, What's all this fuss about? If the family is travelling as well, their faces betray an added responsibility: the marshalling of the baggage (is it all there?), the women, children (keep together!). A mother, her face left unveiled in the urgency of the moment, clutches anxiously a child by the hand, a sack on her back, a baby trussed up in a bundle on her shoulder. The baby, if not stunned into wide-eyed amazement by the novelty of it all, is weeping hopelessly. Stop him crying! There is always the sweetmeat-seller ready at hand with his tray of sticky cakes and pink and green sugarlumps . . . ragged boys pressing hungrily at his heels.

In the tea-houses opening into the yard, caverned deep in the mud brick walls, the lights are on. Bare electric bulbs, hurricane lamps, charcoal fires blowing hot in the grates cast out through the open doorways fierce broad beams of orange light, throwing huge shadows of men and buses across the yard, catching the flash of eyes or teeth, or painted metal. Along the benches against the wall the old men sit, sucking the long-stemmed bubble pipes, sipping the inevitable glasses of green tea; looking on, wisely. A strange scent in the air: wood-smoke and water-pipes, petrol, oranges, the warm breath of spices from the ovens inside; all the smells of a city let loose in the evening air.

It is quite dark. Time for them to leave, any moment now. They are crowding noisily into the buses—a driver has taken his seat and strikes the horn with authority. At last it is cool, a breeze chasing across the flat roofs, over the brown domes of houses edged faintly now with thin moonlight. Walk out in the road where the plane-

trees rustle their dust-caked leaves. Follow the street, not far, and the houses stop, suddenly. Here, someone has dug a field of ditches. Beyond, the roads branch to all the compass-points, white ribbons swallowed immediately into the immense darkness. A bus thunders by, ablaze with light, rocking under its load upon the uneven surface. Someone is chanting the traveller's prayer : a chorus of voices shout the response, high above the muffled roar of the engine. Long after every sound has died away the bus's light is visible, a pin-point moving far in the distance, dwindling, vanishing into a soundless gulf of stars. Turn quickly, walk back towards the warmth and light and comfortable noise of people. Your bus, the bus to Isfahan, leaves tomorrow.

* * * * *

From Azerbaijan and the Caucasus, southeast for a thousand miles to the deep waters of the Arabian Sea, stretches the plateau of Iran. On foothills based four thousand feet above sea-level the mountains range across the bare tableland, chains of brown jagged peaks piercing a blue-brilliant dome of sky. In winter the mountains are white with snow, the peaks locked in conflict with the clouds ; bitter winds sweep down from the northeast, ice-cold from the Turcman steppes. The deserts freeze. In spring the floods break loose. Bridges are washed away ; buses and lorries plough axle-deep through mud, or lie abandoned in the fords. Week-end rivers, half a mile wide, swim suddenly across the desert obliterating the roads, to disappear as suddenly as they came, leaving in their wake a brief riot of grass and flowers, in turn burnt up in the hot breath of summer winds. Time of wind-towers, craning above flat roofs to catch the faintest puff of air ; of dust-devils, pillars of whirling sand dancing across the scorched plains ; a time of boiling radiators, when buses carry chains and matting to fight the sand-drifts, when water is as valuable as life.

In Persia no-one travels for pleasure. There must be a good reason for leaving the familiar surroundings of village or town : business perhaps, a visit to relations, or a pilgrimage to one of the holy cities, the tomb of some saintly Imam. When every journey is a long one, no journey can be undertaken lightly. Some of the dangers of Persian travel have lessened, some have changed their names. Banditry, on the main routes, is almost forgotten ; even the legalised forms of

A Journey to Isfahan

robbery, the provincial tolls, have gone. Still, however, certain lawless gentlemen try to make a living in the south, where the wildness of the terrain must always prove irresistible to the most apathetic outlaw. But the oldest enemy, the desert, remains; and whether one travels by camel or by bus, the desert, and all the age-old terrors inspired by it, can never be long out of mind. Camels, it is true, may die: I have seen more than twenty in a single day, the sand blowing through their ribs, lining an ancient route across the wilderness of the Dasht-'i-Lut, where no buses go. But buses also have a habit of breaking down; and every driver and his mechanic know that one day the engine will simply stop and die, perhaps a hundred miles from the nearest workshop. Though not this time, Insha'allah: God willing.

The ordinary Persian has turned his face inwards, away from the desert. He has learnt to ignore what he cannot comprehend: the power and the terror of this exterior world is of such magnitude as to become, in comparison with his own human efforts, almost meaningless. He lives absorbed in his self-contained community, prizing a fellowship made doubly dear by the relentless hostility on every side. What immediately concerns him, springing from out of the infinity around him, the sandstorms and the rain, he accepts. In the old days when a caravan appeared from over the skyline, and now, when a bus in a cloud of dust rumbles through the streets, the children run out to stare, the loungeer sunning himself against the wall straightens up to gaze at the strangers dropped in for a moment from the outside world. Intruders—these travellers passing through—reminding him, with their glib talk of teeming bazaars and cities far away, of the narrowness and safety of his own quiet market square. Names, names . . . tags at the end of that white track, forcing to the imagination distances so great as to defy calculation in terms of his own fields and hills—to be measured rather in *time*: a month to Shiraz, two months to Kazvin; and now that the camel-days are almost gone, in numbers of days. To travel . . . no; besides, 'God hateth him who roams.'

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I was in Zahedan, a town of southeast Persia: the Afghan and Pakistan frontiers converge not far from it. It could be said that it marks the spot where the Kerman desert ends and the Baluchi desert

begins. . . . It boasts an airport, hardly more than a refuelling station between Tehran and Karachi, a bank and ten thousand people, and its mud-brick houses are as drab, the broad earth streets as rough, as those of any town in Persia. A colony of Sikhs in tight-woven pugarees, their beards carefully tied up in hair-nets, have settled here as merchants; on certain days the narrow lanes of the bazaar are enlivened by the presence of white-turbaned Baluchi tribesmen, Afghans and a horde of Persian nomads in bright red and black rags. The Zahedani townsmen are proud of the western civilisation they are convinced they represent; but any feelings of superiority they might have towards their more backward visitors are confined to conversations among themselves, and evaporate before the actual presence of the tribesmen, particularly the Afghans. With sheepskins slung over their shoulders, these tall dark-bearded strangers from the mountains stalk through the streets not troubling to hide their contempt for the effeminate townsman in his shabby semi-European garb, who mostly is miserably poor—and worse, takes no pains to conceal his poverty; who appears to spend his time shivering in a blanket at street corners, or squatting in melancholy on the carpeted benches of the tea-houses, while his children in open shirts and patched fluttering trousers turn cartwheels in the open streets, to keep themselves warm from the icy wind.

One of these urchins, who preferred to call himself Johnny, attached himself to me and in fact came to regard me as his personal property. Like most Persian boys his hair was crew-cut, a useful custom: until they are old enough to do it themselves the mothers can the more easily remove the lice from their children's heads. Johnny's English was barely recognisable, and was confined to phrases such as: "How are you, Sirr! What a fine morning this day?" Nevertheless he was determined to improve, and each morning was let into my room in company with the breakfast and firewood, and while I was eating, would systematically go through my possessions, trying on with undisguised pleasure the various articles of tattered clothing that still remained to me. He unearthed a hat which I had not yet worn, bought a year ago in a moment of weakness from a famous London store. "I gather, sir, that you will be travelling East? In that case I have the very thing. This hat"—the assistant leaned confidentially

across the counter—"extremely fashionable in Baghdad just now, sir." Tall-crowned, broad-brimmed and of the best grey felt, I had secretly admired myself in it; and though the ribald criticism of friends had to some extent undermined my confidence I had been certain that the time would come when, in favourable circumstances and in its proper locale, the hat would come into its own. Now, however, it seemed that I should not be visiting Baghdad, and besides the vicissitudes of travel had altered its shape: it was stained heavily with oil and smelt strongly of petrol. I presented it to Johnny.

His particular favourite was my silk dressing-gown, sole relic of better days. With this folded about his thin body and the Baghdad hat pulled rakishly over his eyes he would strike a theatrical pose and murmur with passionate intensity, "How—are—YOU—Sir!" Accompanied by Johnny (minus the dressing-gown, but proudly sporting the hat—which gave him a somewhat mushroom-like appearance) I would issue forth from the 'otal,' stepping over the groups of cloaked men huddling over charcoal braziers, out into those brilliant cold mornings through the frozen streets of Zahedan, while a haze of mist and woodsmoke filtered upwards like some offering of incense into the pale blue sky.

It was Johnny who steered me among the multitude of Persian notices at the Post Office, prevented me from buying twice too many stamps, and introduced me to the correct office at the Bank Melli, where my traveller's cheques were changed. I made it clear to Johnny that the sooner I left Zahedan, the better. And so he took me to the bus-station. By day the place was almost deserted. A few buses stood silent in the yard, and a mechanic half covered in oil was sitting on a petrol can mending a puncture. We pushed open a door and discovered a man reading a newspaper while he picked his teeth, his feet up on the desk. "*Salaam aleikum* . . ." Johnny began to explain his mission; the official listened with increasing interest. I began to grow impatient at this prolonged conversation over what was, after all, a very simple matter, and interjected the fundamentals of my request, Kerman—bus—when? He opened a drawer and laid out three rolls of tickets on the desk: white, pink, and a bilious green. Johnny stood back. It was up to me to choose—no explanation of the significance of any of the colours was forthcoming from either

of them. I picked the white, as being the least obnoxious. A groan escaped the official's lips and Johnny waved his hand emphatically, "No, no!" I laid a tentative finger on the pink. The man slid back into his chair with a shrug of despair. I seized upon the green: the official beamed approvingly, and Johnny heaved a sigh of relief. I paid. And now it seemed that this absurd interview was over, except for one important detail: When did the bus leave?

I knew that the road to Kerman was flooded two weeks ago, and all communication in this direction had ceased; but now I understood the road had been repaired. The journey would take two days. Today? I asked hopefully; the official shook his head. Tomorrow, then? I *must* leave tomorrow. It was a mistake, I should have known, to press a point so determinedly. Impatience, to a Persian, is simply bad manners. The direct, 'European,' method of approach is regarded not only as impolite, but little short of brutal. But a foreigner in all his crudity must be accepted, and although most Persians are too polite to show their dislike for this sort of behaviour, they will meet it with a benign passive resistance, an apparent anxiety to please which renders every frontal assault futile. There is more than one doorway leading to the answer of every question: it is the side-entrance that is favoured in Persia. The official began to lose interest; Johnny seemed evasively acquiescent. It seemed that the bus left tomorrow.

The next afternoon I paid my hotel bill, after the usual wrangle over double charges and extras: an exhausting battle in which victory must go to whoever can display most convincingly the appropriate series of emotions involved in such a transaction. It is taken for granted that a foreigner is rich: how else could he have come so far from his own home? And 'every man according to his means' is, after all, only fair. But if one dislikes being cheated, or better still, cannot afford to be cheated, more than is absolutely necessary, then there is an ancient formula whose steps, ordained since time immemorial, must be faithfully followed. The bill is presented. I scan it and fix my eyes on the total. Have I read correctly? Surely there has been some mistake? No. Ha-ha! Then it is a practical joke, and a very good one. I congratulate the hotelier, we laugh heartily. The next stage follows on quickly. The bill is neither a mistake nor a joke. Instant payment is demanded. I refuse point blank. The

demand is sternly repeated. I point out that the bill is a gross fiction, designed to cheat me of my last *rial*, and I pick out at random a few of the more flagrant over-charges. The hotelier begins to get angry. He enlarges upon the excellence of his hotel, of the room, the food, of himself and of his reputation. He raves, gesticulates, his eyes flash. I wait patiently, guarding my strength : I too can flash eyes, wave arms, rave ; all these things I have learned to do if not perfectly at least adequately. My turn will come . . . it has come : I begin. I point to the floor, it is never swept ; to the roof, it leaks ; to the beds, they are dirty, uncomfortable. I describe the quality of the food : revolting ; and the squalor, the incomparable squalor of himself, his guests and his ' hotel.' I appear furious, bitter, almost uncontrolled. (It is true : by this time, I am.) Finally we are finished : each of us has descended, spent, from his tower of ire : we face each other again as ordinary men. It is time to be reasonable. I take him by the arm, and suggest that we make out the bill again, item by item. We compare the total with the original, and find that it has shrunk to half. The hotelier is surprised, shocked : there had indeed been a mistake. He apologises ; we both apologise. I pass across the money, with a generous tip. We shake hands and almost fall on each other's necks ; and we part—friends.

It is important to notice that throughout this entire gamut of emotional stages, not once should either party be sincere. Unfortunately only too often the anger (on my part) is inclined to be genuine. But this is a pity ; because it must be possible to discard and replace each emotion at will ; and to find that one is still angry at a moment when in fact one should be conciliatory, . . . is not only upsetting, it destroys the structure of the bargaining process, tilts a delicate balance with unsatisfactory results. Sometimes I feel that I am being unfair, as a foreigner is not expected to dispute a bill, and is usually in too much of a hurry to waste time arguing ; but although I could always subscribe to the thoroughly un-Persian habit of being always in a hurry, I was never in the enviable position of being able to afford being cheated overmuch. Of course I have still paid too much, probably twice too much ; but not three times . . .

I was surprised when Johnny did not come to say goodbye ; perhaps he would be at the bus-station. But the big wooden gates in

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the archway were closed. I left my baggage on the ground and hammered on the doors. The bus to Kerman! I shouted. It might have gone: already it was getting dark. An old man sat hunched and shivering against the wall, his eyes covered by a corner of his cloak. He jerked his head backwards and stared at me disapprovingly. "*Jomeh*," he said. Friday! The Persian Sunday. No wonder Johnny hadn't appeared.

The next afternoon Johnny arrived punctually and beaming. I thought it pointless to bring up the affair of the previous evening, but tried to make my feelings plain by a certain coldness in my manner. I tried to think of an excuse for his behaviour. No doubt he must have thought that everybody knew nothing happened on a Friday; by 'tomorrow' he had naturally meant 'the first day something *could* happen.' Obviously, faced with my stubbornness, he and the ticket-official had not thought the point worth arguing. . . . We walked to the bus-station in silence. The place had changed overnight. We passed from the quiet street between the open gates into the courtyard, into another, an older world.

It was still early, but dusk; the west still bright with the traces of sunset: that strange blue half-light when faces are hard to recognise, when there is an unreal feeling of being cut off and at the same time blended with one's surroundings. As yet no bus had left, but two had taken up positions facing the archway; a little boy had escaped his mother's arms and was making a wild scramble across the bonnet: only just as he reached out for the slender arm of the windscreen-wiper, a flurry of excited hands including the driver's, his mother's and those of various onlookers, dragged him back. I made my way to the office and found an empty place on the benches against the wall. The warmth of the stove was pleasant after the frosty air outside. Behind the counter the bus official, my acquaintance of two days ago, was defending himself vigorously against the verbal onslaughts of a family of would-be travellers who were pressing in on him, brandishing a bunch of tickets—white ones, I noticed. I watched the official's unsuccessful attempts at explanation without sympathy. Apparently it is the custom to issue more tickets than in fact there are seats. This ensures that every bus leaves full, but the system has its obvious drawbacks, from the passengers' point of view. . . .

A Journey to Isfahan

A number of men had in curiosity collected around me, and a young man who introduced himself as Ahmed took upon himself the job of interpreting the inevitable questions. "Do you like Persia?" "Which is bigger (and therefore better), Tehran or London?" "Why don't you travel by Iran Airways . . .?" Johnny, who was annoyed at finding someone who spoke English better than himself, sat on my suitcase in a sulk. They took from their pockets paper bags crammed with every kind of eatable, and offered me boiled sweets, bread, nuts, lumps of brightly dyed sugar, even a packet of cloves. I retaliated by bringing out my biscuits. It is worth knowing that Persian custom insists that something offered, even a cigarette, must out of politeness be refused at least twice before it can be accepted. Ignorance of this may lead to scenes of acute embarrassment, especially for a stranger like myself, who does not know the correct tone to imply a genuine refusal. Often I have had recourse to feigning illness, by laying my hand tenderly on my forehead or stomach and giving out a slight moan. Sometimes this has the desired effect; usually it only serves to redouble the attentions of my sympathetic acquaintance, who fishes out some infallible and often unpalatable panacea for my imagined ills. But I blush with shame when I remember the occasions when, unaware of this particular item in the Persian code of manners, I have offered someone an English cigarette—always a rare and highly prized object—and on their first and formal refusal, have calmly lighted one myself, returning the packet to my pocket.

Ahmed followed me out into the crowded yard, talking volubly into my ear. He said he was going back to his wife in Kerman. I congratulated him, but the gloomy expression on his face showed that my pleasure on his behalf was misplaced. What he wanted was sympathy. "No, this is trouble," he said, "I married too early." This seemed quite possible. I looked at his thin face with its short crop of back hair, the large dark eyes that alternately glowed with a short-lived vivacity or gazed with a sort of deep sadness as if all the world pained him unutterably . . . or was it indifference? He could not have been more than twenty, and had been married nearly three years. We were standing aside from the main press of people to make ourselves heard above the babble of voices, the throbbing of

the motors. At our feet in the shadow of a bus, huddled in the darkness against the wall I made out the shapes of four women, veiled from head to foot, crouching beside a heap of sacks and boxes. They spoke not a word, but simply waited. A little girl, her face buried in a roll of carpet, moaned softly to herself.

"But your wife," I said, "she must be beautiful——" "Yes, ah yes!" exclaimed Ahmed excitedly; and then after a moment's struggle with himself and a sidelong glance at me—as if to say, Well, I might as well confess all—he sighed deeply and admitted: "No. She is not." "Well then, why did you marry her—if you don't like her?" But really, I knew the answer. Persians very rarely 'marry': they are married. The match is arranged by the parents when the two children are very young; much later comes the ceremony, and the bridal couple who may well not have seen each other until that moment, except for a few ritual words, are pushed together for the start of a new life, if they are lucky in a house of their own, more often to live with one of their in-laws. Ahmed was fortunate in having a place of his own. But it was clear that things were not going well, and he wanted consoling. I offered my sympathies to him as best I could, and hoped that someone was doing the same for his wife, far away in Kerman.

We had moved into the street, where Ahmed was hailed by some acquaintances. I left them to talk. Back in the bus yard I dived into a tea-house, and sat with legs drawn up upon the carpeted bench, sipping at a little glass of scalding tea while the noises of preparation outside were reduced to a distant hum. Nothing had been done to disguise the primitive structure of the room; nails, on which were hanging strings of onions and bunches of dried dates, jutted from the plain mud-plastered wall; pieces of straw stuck out from between the bricks. On a ledge covered with sacking knelt a man saying his prayers, bowing up and down, murmuring gently to himself. There were three others sitting in the shadows, their stolid faces lit by the glow of charcoal braziers. No-one moved, no-one spoke. The samovar hissed on the stove, the fire crackled in the grate, relieving the gloom with sudden darts of flame.

My bus was already two hours late, for no particular reason. It was just late. I could see out through the low open doorway into the

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yard, a confused movement of people round the buses. Somewhere, very near me, a baby was crying; the mother with soft tones trying to soothe it. One of the buses seemed to be starting: the bus to Meshed, a three days' journey; filled with pilgrims to the holy city. The noise of engines and voices, the wail of women and children, reached a new pitch.

A breathless figure burst into the tea-house: Johnny, in my Baghdad hat. "Ah, sir, at last! The bus is to leave!" We stood beside the bus and looked up at the tiers of luggage roped on the roof. The height of the bus had been increased easily by half. It looked as if it would overbalance, and surely bring down the arch over the gateway. I could just make out the corner of my belongings crushed under an enormous tin trunk. A crate of screeching chickens was being pushed into place; a couple of bicycles crowned the whole. I shook Johnny warmly by the hand. He seemed sorry to see me go, almost tearful. "Ah, sir, you have me taught English so greatly!" I made a final adjustment to the brim of his hat; yet I felt that the assistant who had sold it me in London would not have approved.

Somebody gave a signal: there was a rush for the door. In the muddled darkness of the interior I could see that the gangway had been entirely choked with luggage. Sacks of flour, thick wool cloaks and blankets, rolled carpets and huge cotton bags stuffed with clothes and food for the journey were piled waist high between the narrow seats. To reach my own, somewhere at the back, I had to crawl perilously balanced on hands and knees the length of the bus, rough hands helping me on, until I was safely wedged in my place. I was aware of close breathing around me, across the gangway the outline of women's shawled heads. At my elbow a half-moon face was examining me curiously, humming a strange wail of song under his breath as he peered.

On the roof the last knot had been tied. The bus shook: the engine burst into power. The driver shouted something out of the window that was lost in the uproar of last prayers and farewells. Inside the lights went on, the headlights blazed across the yard, putting to rout the groups of startled travellers, the ragged women with their babies, the limping beggars who forgot to limp. We were off—under the old brick arch that bends under the stars, out past the hotel

and the rows of shuttered shops, turning down the blind high-walled streets of Zahedan until suddenly there was nothing, and the windows turned in on us, and it seemed that we travelled almost soundlessly, engulfed in a great darkness that was the desert.

We were alone, making for ourselves a tiny world in motion, a world safe in the familiarity of talk and warmth and the closeness of each other, while a cold wind tore at the canvas roof covers and the bus, defiant with noise and light, drove back the darkness ahead. A glimpse of lit windows, close-packed heads, a smell of dust—and we were gone, and the night and desert closed up behind. “*Allah humma sala a’le Mohammad a’le Mohammad . . . !*” Everyone joined. The *Salavat*, the traveller’s prayer, intoned in a triumphant sing-song chant, one man taking the lead, the rest following with the chorus. The prayer is sung at the start of every journey, whenever in fact the bus begins to move, even after a brief halt. Anyone can take the lead, and in this bus the response was always general and full-hearted. Later when I had travelled in smarter and swifter coaches, where most of the passengers were clerks or students or businessmen, the custom had been almost wholly abandoned: sometimes an old peasant would start up in a quavering voice, but the lack of response would chill the words in his throat. Then, if I had only known the words, I would have shouted them out.

I began to take stock of the bus and its contents. My attention was first drawn to my companion, who had the place next to the window, and who seemed to be taking up more than his fair share of the seat. His name was Mansur, and he offered me a sweet. His face was perfectly round, and the top half of his head was enclosed in a circular turban which once had been white, but with no centre; so that when I stood up—no easy thing to do—I could see the dome of his shaven head protruding. That he possessed immensely broad shoulders was no comfort to me in our painfully restricted position. He was dressed in a most original fashion, having simply bought a large grey blanket and had it cut into a long coat, without lapels or lining, which reached to his knees. What was left over had been used for a waistcoat. Mansur loved to hear himself sing, in that wailing nasal treble that is so admired in Persia. At first I was foolish enough to praise his voice, which later I regretted. Overjoyed at finding an audience as attentive

as himself, he sang for most of the night, and whenever my attention appeared to wander, would bring me back to consciousness by putting his mouth close to my ear. . . . Not that I could really become angry with him. He told me he was born in Kerman, and was now returning from a pilgrimage to Meshed, the tomb of the martyred Imam Reza, one of the greatest saints of Shi'ite Islam. As a pilgrim with this journey to his credit, he was entitled to be called *Mash'adi*; there was no doubt that he was justifiably proud of himself. He never seemed to run short of religious texts, verses, prayers, any of which he would bring out on the slightest pretext. He would roll his black eyes and wrinkle his short snubbed nose, and putting back his head, emit the most heart-rending notes.

There was some rivalry in the bus as to who should lead these communal travelling prayers, on each and every occasion that the bus stopped or started. Mansur considered himself worthy of this privilege, not only because of his fine voice but also because of his late religious experience. But somewhere in the front of the bus there sat an elderly peasant with white whiskers, who wore the green turban that distinguishes those descended from the Prophet himself; and this illustrious gentleman considered it was his inalienable right to lead the prayers. . . . One would have thought that Mansur would gracefully surrender to this greybearded bearer of the green turban, but no, the battle was to be contested to the bitter end. At first it seemed that the green turban would win the day: his years and his descent carried the support of the majority of the passengers. But Mansur was indefatigable, and went about the task of silencing his rival in the most unscrupulous way. He began to start his singing a fraction *before* the bus started, or would peer out of the window and give tongue as soon as the bus even slowed up. . . . Devices which quite put out the greybeard in the front. Even—and this I could not approve, though out of loyalty to my bench-companion I lent him my moral if not vocal support—he would begin his own singing when the old man had already got under way, calculating that a few sleepers in the back would be suddenly woken and follow the nearest and loudest voice. In this presupposition he was usually correct, but it was an unworthy tactic which resulted in a hideous and most unholy babel.

Besides his voice, his broad shoulders and high spirits, there was one further disadvantage of having Mansur as a close companion on a long and tiring journey. He was afflicted with a most unpleasant open sore on the side of his face, which he was forced to dab continually with a filthy piece of wadding. Whenever the discharge became too much, he would wipe the wadding on the window-pane. . . .

Across the gangway, which was piled with luggage up to my chin, sat two women with their daughters aged about ten and fourteen. All four were enveloped from head to foot in *chadors*, the dark blue shawls commonly worn by Persian women. I began to notice that the two girls, with shawls drawn close under their eyes, were regarding me intently. Whenever I happened to glance in their direction they would snatch their heads away and whisper diabolically into their mothers' ears. The mothers stirred uneasily. I was irritated at this: I was being framed. I had visions of these two worthy matrons suddenly denouncing me as a seducer of innocent Moslem maidens and demanding instant vengeance: I could almost see myself left to die, battered with stones by the passengers inflamed with religious and other prejudices. . . . I resolved to remove every possible misunderstanding. The next time I glanced that way, to find the two pairs of velvety black eyes fixed malevolently upon me—I frowned; I scowled. An immediate panic followed, a flutter of shawls and whispers, which resulted in the transfer of the two girls to the seat beyond. In some ways I was rather upset at finding myself so successfully horrific: my face, after all, though having nothing in particular to recommend it, was at least—so I had always thought—quite inoffensive. Perhaps they thought that I had the 'evil eye': anyone in Persia whose eyes are coloured with any resemblance to blue is said to be invested with this unwelcome power. Or else it was my hat, unusual enough in this part of the country—of Caucasian fleece, with ear-flaps. On the other hand, when I looked round at the variety of headgear—turbans, skull-caps, peaked furs, felts—worn by those about me, I realised that mine could not have excited more than a moment's notice. The two girls, now safely beyond my baleful sphere of influence, composed themselves to sleep.

The young ladies were not the only persons intrigued by my presence in the bus; or perhaps 'intrusion' was the better word. But

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Persians are some of the best-mannered people in the world, and unlike most Turks, Afghans, Indians, are prepared to make an effort to conceal their curiosity. I suffered the usual rounds of sweets and cakes. I admitted that I was English ; but when Mansur wondered, diffidently, as to what was my *purpose*, what was my reason for being in Persia, I found myself at a loss to give an adequate reply. No, I was not on business ; no, I had no connection with Oil, or Roads, Surveys or Country Planning. I was beginning to find the subject as absorbing as it was to them. What was I ? Why was I travelling by night in a Persian bus, why was I in Persia at all ? Two elderly men were muttering together, casting an occasional discreet glance in my direction. Ahmed leaned back from his seat further up the bus and called back to me.

"Sir, they say you are *sayyah*. In English, what is *sayyah* ?"

"Something like . . . *pilgrim*," I answered.

It seemed that the question of my identity, at least as far as my companions were concerned, had been satisfactorily solved. I was a *sayyah* ; a pilgrim. Very well, then, a pilgrim, but a most uncertain one, with no definite goal in mind ; travelling, but towards no particular shrine. After all, there are so many to choose from ; and how could I be certain as to where I was going, until I arrived ? I would have liked to go to sleep with this enigmatic thought circulating drowsily in my head, but sleep was almost out of the question.

Nothing could have been more uncomfortable than the seating of this bus. The benches were so narrow and so close together that to put my knees down I had to sit bolt upright. The backs were too short for any head rest. There was a bar in front of me on which I tried to rest my forehead, but even when this was well padded with my hat, the continual bouncing and bumping of the bus threatened to give me a black eye. Every possible position was therefore of exquisite agony. I tried to resign myself to what must be my fate for the next two nights and a day. As the bus tore on through the darkness some of the lights were turned off, and most of my fellow travellers, perhaps more adaptable to conditions of this sort, seemed to drop off to sleep. I began to notice that the interior of the vehicle was decorated in bright pink and white paint, with silken tassels and

fringes of pale green hanging from the ceiling. The attempted luxury, the silk and colours, made a macabre contrast with the real condition of the bus, which seemed to be on the point of falling to pieces. In many places rust had eaten through the paint, revealing in brown patches the scarred and decaying metal. I remembered the battered appearance of the outside, especially the front: the dented bumpers and beaten out wings—evidence of the bus's long and stormy life. Before the driver's seat I could just make out a gallery of lurid religious prints and paintings plastering the cab, charms and Koranic texts, beads, and even a bunch of spring flowers stuck in front of the wheel.

At times I must have dozed, to be rudely awoken by the bus grinding to a standstill before some solitary mud cottage. We would clamber out into the fresh air, shivering in the cold and silence, and disappear into the darkness for a while before entering the warmth of the tea-house, where from crowded ledges round the walls a flood of talk would be loosened by glasses of hot tea, while the drowsy and tousled proprietor busied himself with the eggs over a blazing fire.

Dawn came unawares, lighting the sky behind us, gradually withdrawing the horizon until the distant chains of mountains were revealed in softest shades of blue and purple, and the sun winked over the skyline, turning the desert to gold. We came to our first and only obstacle. The floods of three weeks ago had sent a sudden sea of water down from the hills which had swept the road into oblivion, making for itself a six-foot channel eight hundred yards wide across the plain. The water had gone, but the road had still to be rebuilt, and traffic must cross this belt of fine soft sand. A number of lorries were waiting their turn, and we drew in behind them. Only one vehicle could cross at a time, as the roadmenders had only a few planks to bridge the sand. The planks were thrown down in front of both sets of wheels and the bus would move slowly over them; another set was meanwhile hurled down ahead, and so with a great deal of running and shouting, a steady if ant-like progress was made across the river-bed.

Some of the passengers took the halt as an opportunity to say their midday prayers. They removed their hats and shoes, and spreading cloaks or blankets upon the ground, knelt down unselfconsciously, facing southwest. I noticed that only two prayer-rugs were produced.

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One was faded and moth-eaten, the colours hardly distinguishable; the old gentleman with the green turban, however, unrolled a much better piece, though this too was old and somewhat worn. I caught a glimpse of rich dark reds, blue and a splash of yellow, before the voluminous folds of the old man's white pantaloons hid the rug from my sight.

I asked Ahmed when we should arrive at Kerman. Tonight perhaps, he said; very late. And Isfahan? I would have to take another bus (a much better one) from Kerman: it was another two days' journey to Isfahan.

It was becoming very hot. The sun fastened down upon the tin roof, burning inwards upon the bus's close-packed cargo of bodies. A few windows were forced open, and every now and then someone would take off his hat and brush it free of its coating of white dust. Mansur drew from his pocket a brown-paper envelope; with great care and pride he took out a pair of dark-glasses which he ceremoniously stuck on his nose. Whenever we stopped the glasses were carefully returned to the envelope. He was surprised that I had none. In Persia, as elsewhere in the east, dark-glasses are the hall-mark of a certain urbanity, and therefore of superiority: the larger the lenses the more sophisticated the wearer. It is the same with the quality of shoes. My own shoes should have been discarded long ago; but they were better than Mansur's, which, as I discovered when I walked behind him into a tea-house, had no soles.

The relief offered by those wayside halts was welcome to everyone. Besides the refreshment of tea, there was always the opportunity of having bread and eggs, fruit, and a delicious bowl of *sar-schir*—slightly soured cream taken with sugar. Behind the tea-house there was always fresh water, either an open flowing *quanat* or a water-tank. The passengers would line up, taking turns to pour over each other's heads quantities of the cool water from graceful metal jugs or jars of painted earthenware.

As the afternoon wore on the western horizon was gradually filled with the blue shapes of mountains: to the right the first foothills of the great Kerman range. We were nearing the town of Bam. Columns of whirling sand nearly a hundred feet high danced in company with us across the desert: I have always imagined that it

was in these dust-devils that the dervishes originally found inspiration for the rapid gyrations of their dance.

Sometimes we passed through the remains of villages, derelict shells of houses with crumbling walls and gaping doors, with often a little crenellated mud fort, its towers and arches collapsed in ruin, overlooking the plain. Sometimes these villages seemed only just abandoned : I almost expected to see the last remnants of the villagers trailing out of the far gateway laden with their possessions even as we entered ; but always they were quite deserted. Gusts of wind sent the dust scurrying along the empty streets, dust-devils whirled desultorily in the courtyards. Strange places, where I felt I would not like to be left alone. We never stopped. I once asked Mansur the cause of this sinister abandonment. He simply rolled his eyes and raised his hands, palms upwards. Allah alone knows. Perhaps it was that the buildings, made solely from mud, had been washed away beyond repair in a particularly rainy winter ; more likely it was the failure of the water supply, the collapse of the *quanats*, underground channels that brought water from the mountains, upon which the life of these villages depended.

The town of Bam came in sight. Groves of palm trees waved their feathered leaves against a background of tawny hills, shimmering in the heat ; beyond, the mountain tops glittered with snow. Bam was once an important fortress defending the main road from India ; the battlemented walls and bastions still stand, but the city gates no longer open and close. We drove through the broken wall into the main street. Many of the passengers had reached their destination, and we were to have at least half an hour's halt ; besides, there was something wrong with one of the wheels.

I had become friendly with the driver of the bus, Mohammed, and with his mechanic, Akbar, and already I had been promised a more comfortable seat in the front, once the bus emptied a little. Mohammed was short and square, with a reserve and sense of powerful confidence that must be necessary for one who is responsible for piloting a bus across Persia. Anyone who can drive is much respected by the ordinary Persian, and a bus-driver holds a quite exalted position. He has taken the place of elected leader of the caravan of days gone by, and once the journey is begun, his word is law. Any intransigence

among his passengers he will deal with firmly and often high-handedly : he knows that the rest of the bus will support him. Besides the fact that I was a foreigner and therefore an object of some interest, I earned Mohammed's regard somewhat when he found that I too possessed a vehicle, a 'mosheen,' though admittedly mine was left for the moment wrecked in Baluchistan. Because I was a stranger and was travelling in his bus, Mohammed felt responsible for me, and often without a word to me he would stride into a tea-house and make quite certain with the proprietor that I was not being overcharged. He had a sense of humour, but spoke very little—except to chaff his mechanic, Akbar, a much younger man, tall and well-built with a gay and usually diabolical expression in his eyes. Akbar abounded with energy and strong good humour, which was directed to practical joking ; as when, after a halt by a stream, he filled the old man's green turban with sand . . . a joke which was not, as a matter of fact, taken too well, and which brought on him Mohammed's stern reproof. Akbar never boarded the bus until the last moment, when running alongside he would leap aboard with a shout, swinging the doors shut behind him. Several of the passengers suffered from his clowning and banter, but generally he was popular, as anyone will be who can relieve the monotony of a long journey.

We left Bam as the sun was setting, and before turning northwest, drove for some time straight into the red eye of the sun, blazing over the black ridges of the hills. The desert had turned a fiery crimson, the palms and hills in shadow the deepest black. It seemed that we were moving in the glow of a mighty furnace, an illusion quickly dispelled by sudden gusts of cold air that blew in through the open windows.

The bus was half empty now, and the atmosphere was at once more informal and more cheerful, with everyone joining in the conversation, joking and laughing together. The descendant of the Prophet had got off at Bam, and so Mansur was left in undisputed control of the religious proceedings, an opportunity of which he took the fullest advantage, stretched out in comparative comfort in the back. I sat in the place of honour, next to Mohammed. Behind me a large smiling woman who no longer took the trouble of veiling herself held two cherubic babies in her voluminous lap. It was plain that Moham-

med and Akbar were old friends and understood each other perfectly : a friendship born of long association on numerous desert journeys such as this. There was a photograph stuck on the panel showing the pair of them at a wedding feast, clean and shaven, in smart double-breasted suits, arm in arm. The smooth smiling faces in the photograph bore little resemblance to the swarthy three-day-bearded figures beside me—a contrast I pointed out, and which drew a great hoot of laughter from Akbar. Akbar invented an amusing game in which I played a leading rôle, and which kept the passengers behind convulsed with laughter. He would sing a verse of a Persian song and I would imitate him as exactly as I could, keeping to the tune and producing sounds as similar as possible to his own. The show was a great success. We nearly ran into a camel half blinded by the headlights who was browsing by the roadside, doubtless surprised to see this strange and monstrous meteor of thundering engines, bursting with light and shouting and singing, shoot past him in the night.

I was surprised when Akbar insisted that I follow him in the chanted prayer-call of the *muezzin*—"God is Great, There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his Prophet . . ." but the passengers behind roared with laughter. I thought back on the astonishing contrasts of religious feelings I had noticed in Persia : the cynical indifference of the suave Tehrani, the jealous fervour and prejudice of crowds at holy cities like Qum or Meshed, where it was really dangerous for unbelievers to trespass on sacred ground ; and finally the attitude of the uneducated people of the countryside, where religion is taken as a natural and integral part of living ; where a man may kneel down and pray in the middle of a group of friends or strangers without disturbing himself or those talking over him, and where faith is so deeply and unquestionably founded that unmalicious humour on the subject is accepted without concern, simply because it could do no possible harm.

We stopped in a village where everyone except the tea-house owner was asleep, and where Mohammed treated me to tea and a water-pipe. There also we picked up the postman. He was a little squirrel-like man with clothes and a turban many sizes too large for him. He had short grey hair and little watery eyes, and carried a bulging sealed mailbag which was deposited carefully by the door. An hour later Akbar had to get out and crawl under the bonnet with a screwdriver :

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Mohammed was having difficulty with the steering. Not long after, the little postman nudged Mohammed and pointed to the place where the mailbag should have been, and no longer was. Akbar was detailed to search for it : it was probably under a seat, or mixed up with the other luggage in the gangway. With the bus still in furious motion Akbar began his search, climbing over the passengers, digging out the strangest assortment of bales, sacks and boxes. It soon became quite clear that the mailbag was no longer with us. We drove on in silence, thoughtfully. Suddenly the postman became hysterically alive : he wailed, beat his breast and called upon the saints. He would lose his job, poor fellow, if the mail were not delivered in Kerman that morning. We were all very sympathetic. A jinn had whisked the thing away, possibly in punishment for his sins. Eventually Mohammed was prevailed upon to turn round. Miles back we picked up the mailbag in the light of the headlamps, lying forlornly in the middle of the road. The postman continued the journey silent and thankful, the bag clutched like a child in his arms.

There was a last halt at Mahun, where we wolfed hot stew and flaps of hard bread. I had a few words with Ahmed, who was becoming increasingly depressed as the distance between himself and his wife decreased. It was well after midnight and everyone was very tired. A silence fell on the bus as we climbed the long col southeast of Kerman ; a dark mass of mountains reared close over us, the jagged tops silhouetted against the stars. It had become bitterly cold. My blanket had been borrowed to wrap up the silent babies behind me, and an icy draught was concentrated upon my unprotected shoulders. Mercifully my feet were kept warm by the engine. Mansur set up a howl of thankful prayer as the lights of Kerman finally came into view, sparkling far away at the end of the valley ; he was answered by the rest with a momentary burst of enthusiasm, but our hopes were short-lived. I had often thought of the unwisdom of thanking the Almighty in advance : here we were properly caught ; for the chorus had hardly died away before the steering failed completely, and Mohammed spun the wheel helplessly in his hands. A little tinkering with a spanner and a coil of wire by the resourceful Akbar, and we were off again, crawling drunkenly and at snail's pace along the earthen track. Two hours later we were cruising down the silent

streets of Kerman, and had at last come to rest in the deserted bus-station. Ahmed wandered sadly off to his wife, his bag on his shoulder ; Akbar to stay with friends. The rest of the passengers dispersed after mutual and sleepy farewells and congratulations. Most of the baggage was left on the bus : it was too late to pull it all down. Mohammed made certain that there was room for me to sleep upstairs, before shaking hands and going off to his family. I climbed the stairs above the bus-yard and found a room full of sleeping figures stretched on the floor. A place was free, and rolling myself in my blanket, I lay down and was asleep before I could remember.

* * * * *

A bus-station in the early morning is a desolate place, something like a fairground after a carnival night. The stamped earth floor is littered with pieces of coloured paper, sacks and cases, orange-peel and half collapsed stalls. Coming down only half awake from my upstairs dormitory I found a hunchback leaning on a broom surveying the chaos. I persuaded him to sanction the unloading of the bus, and finally retrieved my case. I wandered into the office and stumbled over the still prostrate body of one of the officials asleep on a couch behind the door. The bus to Isfahan ! I shook him. No. Yes. A bus left today—or was it tomorrow ? But not from here. It appeared that Kerman boasted more than one bus-station. I presented him with a packet of English cigarettes. Very well, he would telephone : his brother possessed a taxi.

A few minutes later I was being raced through the streets of Kerman. Most of the town was still asleep. A few water-carriers were about, with huge brown earthen jars balanced on their donkeys' backs, whose noses were bound with blue beads. We seemed to be making for the open country, and at full speed, the tyres screeching round the corners. Suddenly we turned sharply, twice, and—we were heading the way we had come : he was mad ! And then I saw. Round the corner came into view the great blue and yellow bus. The car swerved across the road to head it off ; the bus hooted irritably, the taxi snorted, we waved. I think the bus would not have stopped if my driver—admirable man—had not smartly reversed the car and planted it firmly along the bus's path. Fortunately the bus braked in time.

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I ignored the abuse that issued from the cab window, and in a moment I had stuffed the taxi-driver's hand with notes, my luggage was stowed away, and I was safely settled inside. I sensed that my irregular and forced intrusion was not approved. I looked out of my window and waved at the taxi-driver. We left him there, grinning, standing in a cloud of dust by his car in the middle of the road.

This bus was very different from the last. It was not so old and travelled much faster. It subscribed to the theory, on the whole a true one, that the faster it went over the hard corrugated dust surface of the road, the smoother the general impression of progress it gave. The seats were better spaced. Unfortunately I was in the extreme back—the only vacant place—and every ten minutes or so the bus would leap a little higher over some more unusual obstruction with the result that I would be hurled into the air and my head would knock smartly against the roof. Although it was hot I kept my hat on to ward off the worst belabourings of my skull. I realised why this seat had had no takers.

The bus cleared a little before midday, and I was able to find a less dangerous seat. I fell into conversation with a quiet young man dressed in a neat dark blue suit who sat next to me on the other side of the gangway. We talked over the head of a little boy who rocked on a little stool set up between us, who had, when the bus hit a particularly severe pothole, to be forcibly held down to prevent him from being seriously injured. My friend was an Inspector of Roads, and was returning to Tehran to 'make a report.' He talked easily of plans to metal all the roads in the country within a few years, but I was not so sure that this was a good idea. In a country the size of Persia the problem of keeping up communications across such vast distances and in such extremes of climate will always be an expensive one. Unless the government can really afford the equipment and skilled labour not only to make the roads but to keep them in good repair I felt it would be wiser to be less ambitious. At the moment the earth-road system is almost adequate. Each province keeps in employment teams of road-workers, hard-bitten peasants mostly, whom one comes across every now and then labouring furiously with spades and pickaxes. Whenever a cloud of dust on the horizon heralds the approach of a car, these people set to work frenziedly, shovelling sand

across the road, smoothing out the surface. So keen and determined do they appear that often they narrowly escape being run down, as they refuse to leave the roadway until the last moment. Besides coping to some extent with the roads, the work offers to thousands of peasants the chance of employment with a bare living wage which otherwise they would be hard put to find.

That afternoon we came in sight of Yazd : against a backcloth of hazy blue sky and brown spiky mountains, the strange outline of minarets and wind-towers, flat-roofed houses and walls, matching the lion-coloured desert on every side. We were lodged in a cheap hotel near the bus-station. I shared a room with three beds in it, opening on to a balcony over a crowded main street. Nearly every plane-tree lining the road was festooned with washing hung out in the sun to dry, a fantastic array of shirts and trousers, blue shawls and coloured turban cloths that gave the street the appearance of a fête. Towards dusk I made my way towards the Friday Mosque and stood under the magnificent pointed arch, a hundred feet high, that guards the entrance. The tiles, enc scrolled with deep blue and yellow, were still warm to touch ; the colours glowed dully in the fading light. It was the last night of the journey : tomorrow, *insha'allah*, my travelling would be over.

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We left Yazd early the next morning, on the last stage to Isfahan. Before midday we passed through Nain. I saw the mosque from a long way off, the dome a strange and lovely pale blue, patterned in the shape of diamonds. I was beginning to understand how it must have felt in the old caravan days, with the camels strung out over this burning wilderness, day after day to move on across these great bare distances where the eye is held by no more than a brown twisted peak of mountain, or the fantastic shapes of rocks distorted on the shimmering horizon to the size of towers. How wonderful it must have been suddenly to make out the thin pencil of a minaret, dark patches of trees—cypress, chenar, palm—and best of all the blue dome of a mosque flashing in the far haze. Blue—the perfect Persian blue, which holds for the desert traveller all the promises of paradise, coolness and shade and running water, rest after the long journey.

A Journey to Isfahan

I looked to the west where black clouds were massing over the mountains. A sudden chill dried the sweat on our foreheads : in the pass a snowstorm struck the bus, buffeting with white flakes the painted metal that two hours before had been too hot to touch. As we descended the snow left off : we would be in Isfahan before sunset. The valley was opening out, unfolding like a patchwork quilt : fresh spring greens, fields of new corn studded with low cottages and groves of white-stemmed poplars. Rain had turned the earth a rich dark brown. I made out the mass of the city below, a glint of the Zayand river winding beyond. A low shaft of yellow light pierced the clouds and touched for an instant the tall minarets of the Madrasch, pointing a gleam to the dome of the Shah's Mosque, dark blue astride a sea of rooftops. Isfahan ! For a moment that sudden vision of the city fulfilled all the dreams and hopes, all that I had read or heard of it : the ghosts and spirits, conjured by its name, were ready to be touched alive, were already waking before me. If, as they had said, I was *sayyah*, a pilgrim, then it was so ; and if every *sayyah* must have his goal, then Isfahan, I knew, was mine.

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The Mixer

BY JOHN PLAYFAIR

THE tide, to their left, was far out. In front, Lionel, taller in his shorts and dark glasses, led the way along a broad wall, built perhaps against the Germans, perhaps against the Romans. For a first afternoon it was sunny, but the beach was almost empty. They felt pleased, of course, having it to themselves, and yet a little disappointed; was it possibly not quite the right season, or did people no longer come to the Channel Islands? Eventually, twenty yards from a solitary girl in a blue bikini, Lionel jumped off the wall and pointed to a flat piece of sand; Peter gave Jane a hand down, managing to give her a kiss, too, on the way; she undressed cunningly under a towel and stretched out beside him; Lionel sat four feet away and opened his book, and the holiday began.

"Lionel, you should have brought your things," Jane said. "It's really warm." But he sat and stared over his book at the girl in blue. One felt that she would be dark, though a picture-paper covered her head.

"That," Peter announced, "must be today's underpiece of master-statement." Rather pleased with this, he droned on: "Masterstate of underpiecement . . . piece of undermasterstatement . . . state of master underpiece . . . under piecemaster of state . . ." Jane sighed and struck the sand gently with her clenched fist. But, being soft, it kept her irritation secret.

Presently the girl in blue stretched herself and stood up. She had long black hair and a neat, plump body. Running to the edge of the water she waded timidly in until it was up to her thighs, then threw herself down with a splash and swam out to sea.

"French," Lionel declared. "Masses of them here."

"Italian," said Jane, who had also been watching.

They found a penny and Peter spun it. "Tails. Italian."

The Mixer

"Bella ragazza," Lionel murmured. "Mi piacono gli occhi tuoi . . . ridenti e fuggitivi, e . . . lieta something something gioventù . . . But they don't usually go in for bikinis." He opened Buddenbrooks again, a little reluctantly.

At six o'clock the sun went behind a cloud. The dark girl had moved and was sitting against the wall, reading her paper. And as the shade, racing along the beach, peeled all the fun from nakedness, leaving their bodies cold and foolish, Peter and Jane began simultaneously to collect their things, smiling at each other—obviously, Lionel mused, under the impression that this showed them to be *en rapport*. "Don't wait for me," he said. "I'll be ten minutes." He turned the pages of his book. "End of a chapter . . ."

"All right. See you in the bar." Peter took Jane's free hand and helped her up on to the wall, and then off it again on to the golf course, also surprisingly bare. It was too bad, this emptiness. One talked practically in a whisper, whereas on holiday one ought to shout, run about, and enjoy oneself. And show off one's girl. "See you in the bar," he repeated, at the door of her room. At least the rooms were handy; the hotel chaps knew their business, even if the island was half deserted.

In the bar things were better. Handsome, haughty people in tweed drank their gins with approval, and there was noise. Damn nice gin, they seemed to be saying—damn good bar, damn fine hotel. Peter felt pleased; evidently he had chosen the right place after all. Jane sat already in a corner, demure, but quite as pretty as the others. "No Lionel," she said. "But he did say don't wait, so buy me a Dubonnet, there's a sweet, and he likes whisky, doesn't he?"

"Does he?" It was a struggle to get through, but a nice healthy struggle, not unlike a rugger scrum. Then a setback. A man faced him. "*Excusez moi, monsieur. Vous avez l'heure?*" Peter looked wildly at his wrist, where he had forgotten to put his watch.

"I . . . er . . . ne connais pas . . ." For his affair with the French language had ended after the briefest flirtation. ". . . Pardon." But turning round with the drinks he found Lionel grinning, and was annoyed. Lionel always had the time, and would have known how to say it in elegant French. Besides, it was crazy

not to have a clock in a bar ! He gave Lionel his drink and carried the others to the corner where Jane was, letting their fingers meet for a moment round the glass as he handed it to her. "Well." He squeezed in beside her, leaving the chair for Lionel. "And where did you get to ? Asleep, I suppose, over your tome ?"

"No, I stayed to have a word with that girl," Lionel said. "As I thought, she was French—from Paris. She works here in summer as *bonne à tout faire* to a business man—a broker in precious metals—who takes a villa every year on the hill above Gorey. The castle there, apparently, is famous and worth looking at."

"So was she, I daresay, from close up ?" Peter said knowingly.

Lionel considered. "Yes, in a *soubrette* way. Black hair, of course, is a weakness I do have."

"She had a heavenly tan, I must say," said Jane, screwing up her eyes to recall something nice to congratulate Lionel on.

"Hm. Peeling a little on the back, which I also found attractive, for some reason."

"You ought to meet her again," Peter suggested. Jane was his girl, no mistake about that. They had agreed. Not that poor Lionel would be a very deadly rival ! "We could go dancing then."

Lionel fondled his glass. "Not my type really, I think. Charming, of course, but simple. I don't suppose she's even heard of Proust."

They went in to dinner soon after this, each happy in one way or another ; Lionel because there was lobster, Peter because people looked approvingly at Jane, and Jane because she was excited. She had never dreamed that sin would be such fun. . . .

"Today," Lionel informed them at breakfast the next morning, "I shall paint. I feel that Gorey will be paintable."

"I thought it was out of date to like things to be picture-skew," Peter said, and Jane, to her surprise, laughed. Picture-skew ; a bit of *tout droit* ; carry on, Jeeves ; the horrible puns—usually they made her squirm, but now she laughed ! For already out of sin something magical had come. . . .

"It is the unique privilege of the artist," Lionel continued, "to make the beautiful ugly, thus correcting the unjust balance of nature."

The Mixer

He didn't believe this, of course, but he ate his toast with precision and licked his fingers quite as if he did.

The sun blazed again that day, unblinking and unchallenged in the sky—just as they were alone and unmolested on the sand. Even the dark girl wasn't to be seen.

"Poor old Lionel, he never could relax." Peter rubbed oil with slight distaste into Jane's pale, freckled back. "Always painting or composing or learning German or something." He went on talking as he rubbed, so as not to give her a silence to be sentimental in. One felt so unlike that in the morning. But when she did speak, it was only to say :

"Oh, I think he's rather attractive. So thin, and a bit bald . . ."

"Bald? He's no more bald than you are." Peter tugged at a strand of hair, then remembered the time of day and let go. Jane sat up and took the bottle of oil.

"Yes, but he somehow *looks* bald. . . ."

Lionel didn't come in for lunch, but they found him at tea-time on the veranda, with two cups of pale china tea and *The Times*. Jane asked where he had been, and whether he had seen his French girl again.

"How could he have?" Peter winked at her. "We saw her on the beach, didn't we? With a *man*." But Jane said nothing, not wanting to spoil the joke or to tease Lionel, who said :

"It's remarkable the people one finds here. I had lunch on the hill above the castle, at a place where one can see into both bays. There was a family there from Aberdeen—father, mother, and daughter. Fancy coming so far! I mean, for another few shillings they could have got to France. Anyway, the daughter was a real beauty—the sort of girl who, born into a noble family a century or two ago, could have had Europe at her feet. Dark, you know, and Spanish-looking. Positively aristocratic. And everything just so, *à la* Lola Montez—you remember? Three black : the hair, the eyes, the . . . whatever it was—three white, three small, and so on."

"But blushing unseen, eh?" Peter said, picking up the paper.

Lionel sighed. "Truer than you know. The dear creature aspires to become a radiographer. A melancholy waste, it seemed to me."

"Why didn't you ask her out?" Jane said. "You know Peter wants to go dancing."

"Her mother," he explained, "clearly wishes the girl kept pure for a suitable marriage. She was protective to the point of hostility."

Peter put down the paper, having finished the sports page, yawning. "Billiards or snooker?"

"Well, I'll go to my room," Jane said, "and leave you to fight it out."

Lionel chose billiards and won. After the game they sat in the bar and studied the other guests, who wore and drank and said precisely the same things as the evening before. Only one face was new: a youngish, dark man, very good-looking, in a pale grey gaberdine suit and suede shoes. French, undoubtedly—this time they agreed. He sat on a high stool, a glass of whisky untouched in his hand, and looked sadly about him under lazy eyelids. Lionel felt he recognised the face, perhaps from a film. "Better watch Jane," he warned.

But Jane at dinner surveyed the stranger coolly and pronounced him not at all attractive; too ruthless and cunning. "He has a cruel mouth," she said, at which Peter, wondering what his own looked like, concentrated on letting a gentle smile play about his lips, with the result that he ate very little. Besides, with Jane in a low-cut dress, he began to be impatient for nightfall. But after dinner they bought brandy and lit cigars, since it was not yet nine o'clock.

After a minute Lionel, who had noticed the newcomer sitting alone on the veranda, announced his intention of strolling once round the hotel before settling down to his book. But he was away a long time and Peter knew in his bones that the two must have got into conversation.

"Talking to that Frog, I expect," he observed. "He's always picking up foreigners. Awful risk."

"Jealous," said Jane, fondly straightening his tie. "So would you like to."

He came back at last, his cigar almost out, in an aura of suppressed information. "Well," he began, sitting down opposite them, "what a surprise! First of all, he's Swiss, not French. And far from being on the prowl, he's recovering from an operation."

"An operation!" Jane exclaimed. "Good gracious, poor man! Whatever on?"

"He had stones in his kidney. It appears that they hurt when they tried to get out. A quite frightful pain, he said. He used to have to lie down and take drugs until it passed. Then he had the operation, in Basle, which cost him two hundred pounds, and was doing wonderfully well until this afternoon he had another attack. Now, of course, he doesn't know when it's going to come back or what to do about it. He even asked if I had any morphia with me."

"Oh, poor man!" Jane was practically in tears. "And I said he looked ruthless!"

"Obviously an addict," Peter said, crushing out his cigar. "Or avoiding military service, don't you think?"

"I wish you'd asked him over," said Jane. "I feel I owe him an apology."

"I did. But he only arrived tonight and wanted to go to bed early."

Peter got up. "Admirable idea," he said.

On the third day the weather was less promising, so they decided to visit the castle. Over the golf course, across a tongue of sand that jutted up from the beach, past rows of semi-detached love-nests, differing only in name—Mon Abri, Beau Rivage, L'Enclos, Paradis—Lionel led them, waving and pointing, towards the castle, reading the signboards in impeccable French and tapping them with his rolled English umbrella—a Londoner, at home anywhere.

"Mount Orgeuil Castle. 1496. Ah!" From the sea-front they climbed a steep path between, at first, two curiosity shops, then two banks of wild rose, and lastly two formal flower-beds. Below the castle, neatly railed round, was a stretch of smooth grass where there were seats overlooking the harbour. Here, gratefully, they sat, admiring the view. Lionel produced a tiny notebook and made a quick sketch of the bay. Then he drew on other pages boats, houses, trees, in detail. Some of the people passing stopped to look, but most, superior in the knowledge of what artists like and don't like, took no notice. Among these, a party of four dark girls, gaily

scarved, one of them tall and splendid in flaming red, sauntered up the path to the castle gate.

"Spanish." Jane gazed enviously at their golden skins and indolent waists. "Inez, Manuccia," she recited dreamily, "Isabel, Lucia, mock time that flies. . . ."

"Italian," said Lionel, who had heard a scrap of their conversation. And as they watched, the girls stopped for a moment at the turnstile and vanished from sight. Then, at intervals, the red dress could be seen on one or other of the ramparts, swinging languidly along the battlements, and finally appearing at the top.

"Let's go up," Jane said at last.

"I'll wait for you here." Lionel scarcely looked up from his drawing. "You go on."

So they set off along the path, paid their two shillings, and began the climb, waiting to let the guide and his party get well ahead. Peter, at each level, peered out to inspect the view, but Jane wouldn't look until they reached the top. The conducted tour seemed to have stuck half-way up, so they had to squeeze past, and then at the spiral staircase that led to the highest tower of all they stood aside in turn to let the Italian girls come down, which they did unhurriedly, looking very bored and twisting their brilliant scarves round their necks.

"Bit of *tout droit*, that one in red," Peter said, giving Jane a gentle smack and laughing to conceal his regret that she too wasn't dark and elegant. But she hurried on and stood at the edge.

"Oh, look, Peter! How *minute*. Why, you can see miles."

"Mm. There's the hotel." He pointed to a tiny matchbox at one side of a flat green square, criss-crossed by ant-like figures. "And the golf course. . . ."

For a long time they stood in silence, leaning cautiously on the crumbling stone parapet. No sound reached them, except the faint crash of waves breaking on the pier far below and the whine of seagulls wheeling ceaselessly around the castle, with an occasional swoop towards one of the boats in the harbour. . . .

Jane broke the silence eventually. "Isn't it amazing how they glide round and round for ever without the slightest effort? It must be a heavenly feeling."

"They steer with their tail feathers," Peter said.

"And they seem to glide uphill too! Don't you wish we could be seagulls, just for an hour?"

"Thermals," he explained. "They make use of air currents. Hot air off the land rises; it's all instinct, of course."

"Mm." Jane gazed longingly about her. "But I still think it's amazing. . . ."

"Look, there's Lionel." Peter pointed to a bench on the grass, where a tiny figure sat. They could just see him uncross his legs, cross them again, and turn over a page of his book. "Still scribbling." They waved and shouted, but he didn't look up. Then the four girls appeared on the path below, their yellow scarves and the red dress making a pinpoint of intense colour on the green lawn. They passed within a few feet of where Lionel sat, without paying him any attention, though he was drawing away furiously. He turned his head to watch them vanish down the steps, and then resumed his sketch. "Well, he didn't succeed in getting off with that lot, at any rate!" Peter sounded rather pleased. "Perhaps he doesn't know as much Wop lingo as he makes out."

"He does look lonely." Jane murmured. "From up here, I mean."

On the way down they didn't speak. Jane ran, her heart pounding from the height and the speed and the beauty of the foreign girls and the loneliness of Lionel and everything sad and lovely, while Peter followed with big, slow strides, wondering whether two weeks wasn't going to be a bit too long. Panting, they reached Lionel's bench together.

"Nice?" he enquired, glancing up. He had drawn narrow straggling lines across a page of his book, and on them white notes, black notes, flying tails.

"Oh, look, music!" Jane cried. Lionel closed the book.

"Your Italian symphony, I suppose?" Peter said, sitting down.

Lionel smiled. "Odd you should say that. You remember those four girls? Well, they're from Livorno—you know, where I was last year. A curious coincidence."

Jane sat down too, slowly. "How . . . do you know?"

"They told me. They came past this way while you were in the

John Playfair

castle and we had quite a chat. It's their last day here, apparently, after which they go back to shorthand-typing in Italy. Except the one in red—she's a model, and one can quite see why. But then they all seem to know what to wear. . . . Anyhow, they appeared to think my Italian adequate, which was nice. It's too bad you missed them." He got up, putting on his dark glasses. "But it must be time for lunch, surely?"

The Abbot

BY ROY HARROD

MY wife and I were travelling in Japan under the auspices of the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, a Japanese financial daily newspaper. Our arrival at Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan, a vast city comprising much of the modern world but containing also thousands of temples and shrines, was a moment of excitement for us. With Professor Kobe, who acted as my interpreter, we were escorted to a compound containing a great series of temples, where we were promised the sight of very splendid paintings.

We entered some apartments, and suddenly, without any fuss—there had no doubt been some previous warning—the abbot, under whose charge were all the temples, was standing in his fine brown robe to greet us. There was little formality, and he took us onwards. Soon we came to a room, where cushions were arranged in preparation for tea drinking, in accordance with the custom of Japanese hospitality.

The abbot squatted on his cushion at the head of the room, and we were arranged in a straight line down the left side of it. Thus we formed a little congregation for this high priest. There were five of us ; my wife, my interpreter, and our two Japanese hosts. He made some light conversation (through the interpreter), and told us of a Cambridge student, who had been doing research there. We spoke of the student's work, and also of the ways of life of students in Cambridge. After a time he fell into a soliloquy. He was speaking of death, although the conversation had not led up to it. I give his words inevitably, now and subsequently, in an abbreviated form. Man tended to struggle against the idea of death. Then he might pray to be lifted above that struggle ; but so to pray was itself to continue the struggle. The right thing to do was to know that one could whisk away the struggle, just as, if one found some live embers

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on the middle of one's head, one simply brushed them off, and he demonstrated this with a brisk action of his hand.

I was impressed. Our host evidently deemed it right to give us a brief discourse on one aspect of Zen Buddhist ideas—on death itself. I did not then know that a great deal more was to come later.

His thought was clear and pointed ; he showed exactly what he meant by this brushing aside of the struggle against death. All the same his analogy did not seem quite apposite. It was all very well for him, with his highly-polished pate, but I felt that I should have greater difficulty with live embers on my mop of hair ; I should have had to rush to a shower like Mary Martin—'Get that man out of your hair.' Also, those live embers on the top of one's head seemed rather out of the natural run of things. But when I looked through the great vistas of empty rooms, it occurred to me that live embers in their brimming braziers were almost the only movable objects, and, as one always sat at ground level, this eventuality might not be uncommon.

We asked the abbot if monks were allowed to marry. They used not to do so, but the custom was creeping in. He was not violently shocked by this, for he was moderate in all things. But he was against it. A married man tended, and ought, to have regard to enlarging the financial resources available for his wife and children, but this distracted his mind from what it ought to be dwelling on.

We rose and went on to look at the wonderful pictures we had come to see. He interrupted his account of the pictures to explain that the purpose of priests in his religion was not to make other people better, but to make themselves better. I felt that I knew already that that was so, but it was satisfactory to have it confirmed.

Later we came to one of his gardens of stones. Such a garden consists of a rectangle of fine, white gravel, glistening in the sunshine ; it is carefully raked every day, so that the gravel runs in long, straight ridges. Amid the gravel were fifteen small rocks, ranged in five groups ; there was something significant about the varying numbers in each group. Around each island of rocks, there might be regular curves in the ridges of gravel. Alongside this rectangle was a low parapet, on which one should sit and gaze at the bare gravel

garden. If one did so quietly and for some time, one thought that the gravel, with its ridges, was an inland sea, with its ripples glistening in the sunshine, and that the rocks were islands which studded it. One was filled with a sense of the beauty of this sea, and that was conducive to 'contemplation.' Here in the temple, just sitting by a simple piece of gravel, albeit carefully tended, one could enjoy the beauties of nature, of an island-studded sea, without the vulgarity and extravagance of going on a trip to the seaside.

The abbot explained how he trained the novices to rake the gravel. Did he ever do it himself? I asked. "Oh, yes, occasionally; it is my golf." He told us with evident pleasure that Unesco intended to construct just such a garden in its premises in Paris.

We went on, and for a short time we seemed to be transferred to the attention of the head of one of the temples. He had two interconnected gravel areas. I felt that I was now in a different atmosphere, for he particularised more about the objects in his gardens. One was a lake in China; he showed me where it flowed into the sea; the rock islands had the names of animals, and he expected me to discern their likenesses in the shape of the rocks. I felt that this was too particular; in his monkish incarceration he seemed to be acquiring the mentality of a child, who has to imagine all sorts of personalities and adventures for his little toy soldiers. But we were soon returned to our abbot, with his more serene and universal outlook.

He took us on to a different kind of garden. This was in a narrow confine; it had the rocks, but they were more regularly arranged in a diagonal formation, and the groundwork was not gravel, but moss. This was a little neglected, turning to mud at the edges. Perhaps the resources of his establishment were not adequate for its care, although the neglect may have been partly deliberate. If one's thoughts had not been at that moment only on rocks, one might have taken this just for a neglected corner of the premises. But, in fact, it was a garden of great antiquity, dating from the Muromachi period. The abbot discoursed at length about this. He explained that the more regular symmetry of the garden represented the spirit of the age, when everything was put in precise order, and all life had a planned and considered shape. But that set order of things could not remain so for ever; in due course one has to yield somewhat to natural forces,

and allow the pattern to be altered. He told us that whenever he looked at some relic of the Muromachi period and was reminded of its settled order of life, he found it *touching*.

A thought of my friend, Philip Toynbee, flashed into my mind. Werther, looking at the well-planned garden of a dead count, now fallen into decay, shed tears. To Toynbee this seemed a contemptible hypocrisy. How did the young man *dare* expect one to believe that he wept for someone whom he had never even seen? If Toynbee reacted badly against Goethe, so did I on that occasion against Toynbee. This harsh rejection of such a sentiment struck me as a manifestation of barbarous materialism, for all Toynbee's 'idealism.'¹

I scrutinised the abbot's face closely, seeking for any trace of hypocrisy. There was none; it was impossible to think that. In all these discourses he talked most graciously and naturally; there was a vein of humour running all through, and he sometimes laughed. But the humour was not conveyed by the interpretation.

I felt absolutely in unison with him, in finding pathos in this garden of the Muromachi period. That fine civilization had certainly had to yield something to natural forces in the form of the civil wars which subsequently ravaged Japan. And then one thought also of the still more frightful things that have happened in that country in recent years. And there was this garden, the decayed remains of that old, settled, civilised age.

But whether the decaying pattern laid out before one is a representation of a departed civilisation, or of the aspirations of a deceased count, all over and done with now, is it not fitting to shed tears? May not an occasional sense of pathos be quite necessary to counterbalance that jumble of man's conflicting passions, in spite of which he somehow contrives to maintain some kind of equilibrium in himself and in society?

*Time with the gift of tears,
Grief with the glass that ran.*

We then came into a very tiny square-shaped room, where there was barely space enough for the six of us to squat on our cushions. This was a room devoted to the tea ceremony. The abbot wished to

¹ *Observer*, April 14, 1957.

talk to us about that. He said that it was good to have a room of small dimensions, because close proximity brought one into a feeling of fellowship and friendship. It is to be remembered that all these Japanese apartments are quite bare ; there were no obtrusive bits of furniture to crowd one. We asked if talking was allowed at the tea ceremony, and he replied that it certainly was, but only about gracious things, like art, and not vulgar gossip.

There was more to the narrow confinement than the engendering of intimacy. It gave one the sense that the fruitfulness and the joy of conversation could be won without any extensive material trappings. One could enjoy all the delight of it in this tiny space, and that enhanced its value, and made one feel that the human spirit was independent of external aid.

He then proceeded to tell us how the tea ceremony was intimately connected with the idea of 'wabi,' which was difficult to explain. When a man gets old, the widespreading desires and ambitions of his earlier life decline, and his being seems to shrink. The abbot hinted that he himself was in that phase, and looked round his company to see if there was anyone who might share the sentiments of declining years. I am sorry to say that he picked upon myself. But then at the tea ceremony one engages in conversation, and it becomes apparent, in the interchange of ideas, that one has just as great a vitality of thought as ever one had, perhaps a greater vitality. There amid the shrinking of desires was the sustaining power of thought. 'Wabi' was connected with this.

He sought for an analogy. One might go into a farmstead and find the owners there who seemed to be withered, old and decayed ; the place was rather shabby. Its days would evidently soon be over. But then round a corner a splendid stallion appeared. One's former idea had been quite wrong ; something important was still going forward ; there was, indeed, still life in this old place. And likewise one's idea of continuing vitality was confirmed by the conversation of the tea ceremony.

One began to have some notion of 'wabi.' But then he brought in another idea, which did not seem closely related. The history of man had been triumphant, he had conquered the domestic animals, and was lord of creation. When he thought of this, he must feel

a little abashed and humble. And so, as a token of his humility, as a sign that he was not blinded by his great successes, when offered, say, ten things to eat, he should choose to take eight only. I was grateful to him for this precise numerical definition of the degree of asceticism that his religion required, but I had an uncomfortable feeling that, had he had me there as a novice, he would have wished to reduce my standard of living by more than one-fifth.

He turned to me and suggested that, as an economist, I must be in sympathy with the frugality implied by 'wabi.' Our interpreter interjected that I might not be in such sympathy, as I was a Keynesian economist. An excellent point; but one, I felt, a little too dialectical for the temper of the abbot. However, our interpreter was also a Japanese, and thereby a man of tact, and I do not think that he interpreted his gloss to the abbot.

We wandered on. I could not help wondering how many English divines, when showing some foreigners round a cathedral, would succeed in the intervals in conveying some of the spiritual teaching of Christianity. The abbot talked very charmingly, and easily, and humorously; his teachings were interwoven with the general conversation; they seemed to overflow. But it must not be supposed that this was merely haphazard and unintentional; it was evident that he regarded it as a pleasure and privilege—if one said it was also his duty, that would perhaps have too Christian a flavour—to spread his reflections before us. If he was to show us the marvellous material treasures of his temples, it was fitting that he should also give us a glimpse of the spiritual treasures of his religion.

He had ideas on aesthetics also. In showing us some sixteenth-century pictures, he pointed out that the whole representation was achieved by a combination at different angles of shapes all having this form.



Then he pointed out how, in later periods, the sharp corners were

somewhat blurred ; and later still they were further transformed into continuous curves which were 'merely decorative,' but had no strength.

He thought that a picture should have a moral. He showed us one of a monkey surrounded by some sage-looking men. In a discourse on this he reverted to the old principle that it was right to make some concession to natural forces. The morals that he found in his pictures were indeed so delicate and gossamer, that I do not think the most anti-moralist of aesthetic critics could have been rendered cross by them.

When the pictures were ordered, the painters had been told that they should do simple and restrained work for the temples. He took us into a room where the whole of two walls was covered by a superb tracery of branches and flowers. This, he explained, was too rich and sumptuous to accord well with 'wabi.' But none the less they had accepted the picture. I was grateful for their toleration of it, since here was I, three hundred years later, able to bask in its sublime beauty.

When we had finished our tour, which was quite prolonged, and came to bow goodbye to each other, I asked the interpreter to express my gratitude to the abbot for his fascinating and inspiring discourses.

But he had the last word.

"I am sorry to have taken up so much of your time with my foolish nothings."

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Who then was the Gentleman?

BY FRANCIS WOODBURN LEARY

THEIR lives were mean and cruel. They were old at thirty, used up at forty. If skilled, they earned 4*d.* a day ; if unskilled, 2*d.* a day—rates fixed by law. If lucky enough to have a few acres of land, they paid manorial rackrent, either in labour or in money. Poll taxes of a shilling a head, as much as ermine-gowned burgesses paid, were squeezed out of them. They wore the same rags day in, day out ; their 'shoon' were wooden clogs or ankle boots of stiff oxhide. Their houses were clay hovels, rat-infested ; they slept on verminous straw. Their hours of labour were from sunup to sunset ; afterwards, their time was their own. They were free to get drunk, which they did frequently, on dark bitter ale. Or they could fornicate, which they also did frequently. Beds were few and icy ; the only way to keep warm was to crawl in with a hot posset and a wench. They might also read, but most of them were unlettered ; and if by some odd chance they could spell out a few words, no one had any books. It was dangerous to be caught reading. Only Lollards read ; and Lollardy was punished by the stake.

On Sundays and Feast Days, they were expected to put on their least filthy tunic and to appear in church. They were also expected to tithe. Of course, if they did not have the cash—and generally they saw very little cash—they might work off their tithes in the fields or gardens of the local monastery. Or they might bring a sheep or a goat to the parish priest. Additional fees were collected by the Church for baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and funerals.

They were never alone. They lived in herds, disease passing like a train of Greek-fire through each in turn. They dwelt continually with death ; and when their souls passed to that unimaginable ice-palace of Heaven, of which the priests spoke, their unconfined bodies manured the earth ; and as the nation grew and was sustained by their

Who then was the Gentleman?

living toil, so the very earth of England was nourished by their decay.

They were the labouring commons ; the apprentices and journey-men, the peasant tenantry. . . .

* * * * *

In 1450, Kent was a forge and working-house of discontent. Roving the highways were old soldiers from the wars, ' those who sit broken-legged in the soft warm Sundays, to beg silver ' ; the wrecks of Lollardy, gaunt inspired men, shambling along, muttering alone . . . *John Ball hath rung your bell; and greeteth you well. Now right and might, will and skill. Now God haste you in everything. . . .* A horde of wayfarers, pack pedlars, grinders, tinkers, fortune-tellers, workers in glass, pottery, wood and leather . . . and a whole ragged rainbow with nothing to sell but sweat and muscle.

Into this fermenting bowl, Richard Plantagenet in Dublin (Duke of York and Lieutenant in Ireland), supping with the Devil, reached a very long spoon.

A stranger appeared one day in Kent. He had a knowing air, was approachable and friendly. Jack Cade, he called himself. The word ' cade ' means a small barrel or cask. No one seemed to know where the newcomer hailed from, but folk noted that Jack spoke with an Irish lilt. With Jack, the talk usually got around to the evil state of the kingdom and the King's bad counsellors, William de la Pole, Marquess of Suffolk, and Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset. Nothing surprising in that, for conversations in Kent often touched these matters. Kentish folk remembered Wat Tyler and the ' hurling tyme ' of 1381.

But, unlike the usual rambling inconclusive memories, talks with Jack Cade seemed to have purpose ; he was getting at something. Kent found out what when Suffolk, former Chancellor and head of the peace faction, was murdered at Dover by hirelings of those favouring war with France, of whom Richard Duke of York was certainly one. It was a grass-fire signal. Jack, it turned out, had organised committees of sturdy rogues all over the shire. In case of an emergency, he explained.

Well, the emergency had arrived. It was Wat Tyler come again.

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Horsemen dashed over the shire, carrying the word. *When Adam delved and Eve span, who then was the gentleman?* . . . the old cry of John Ball on Blackheath.

And they heard; and they answered.

They downed tools, left plough and workbench, crept out of their evil cavelike dwellings into the shining day. They stood like men, laughing and weeping, shaking hands; life was good and the 'great Captain of Kent'—Jack Cade—would make it better. Soon, they collected a mighty company at Canterbury, sanctified by the memory of Tyler, where old Wat and Jack Straw and John Ball had assembled a wild and faggot-throwing array of the commons of Kent, in the time of Richard the Second.

It was a company of rags and patches, men without banners. But Jack, it seemed, had thought of everything. Those who knew the use of arms (and they were not a few!) were issued swords and billhooks, collected by Jack's committees. There were even yew bows and clothyard arrows of ash wood. In the Market Cross of Canterbury, Jack appeared on a scaffolding and made a talk. They were come together, he announced, to restore the ancient rights of freeborn Englishmen—a *field full of folk!* as Piers Ploughman long ago had proclaimed. They would go to London, to see King Henry. And Queen Margaret! a tinker shouted. Jack laughed; and put a hand to his hip, with a haughty air. The crowd roared.

They would get rid of the traitorous knaves who had sold England's right in France and pocketed the money, Jack promised. He named no names, but everyone knew he meant the Duke of Somerset and other friends of the murdered Suffolk, men whom Queen Margaret still kept in power. The Duke of York, that fine gentleman far away in Dublin, whose heart bled for the suffering peasants, would be recalled to the King's side. Taxes would be abolished; and the cruel Ordinance of Labourers that forbade a man to sell his skill where he would, at a living wage. Elections to Parliament would be made honest.¹ Finally, Jack shouted, the commons of Kent would give

¹ As Professor C. W. Oman points out, this was hardly a revolutionary programme; more like a programme drafted by Richard of York than by a firebrand such as Wat Tyler. The peasants, however, continued to identify Cade with Tyler, until the glaring inconsistency of his conduct destroyed him.

Who then was the Gentleman?

short shrift to clerks and lawyers. Wat Tyler of glorious memory had hated lawyers, tools of the rich and of the Church.

And now, as a reminder to the lords in London that the Kentish folk meant business—

Jack rapped out an order. Men appeared, dragging a black scarecrow trussed like a sheep carcass on a pole. They hoisted the scarecrow onto the scaffold; and then it was seen that this was a real scaffold after all, with rope and crossbar. Jack himself pulled the trap; the black thing leaped and danced, about the scrawny neck dangling a pen and ink-horn—symbols of the clerk.

The crowd roared.

Presently, they hit the road to London, no longer an aimless horde, but a marshalled array, with the Constables of the Hundreds marching at the head of their musters. And at the fore, on his silver horse, rode Kent's great Captain, Jack Cade—'John Amende-alle,' as his ecstatic followers termed him. Beside Jack rode his principal officers: the Banner-bearer with the stiff square Standard of the White Wolf, the strange device that Jack had chosen for the Company; the Sword-bearer Robert Poynings; the Herald of Exeter, in blue and silver tabard, whom Jack had persuaded to throw in with the commons; and Harry Lovelace, Jack's second-in-command.

Still they came, Wat and Will and Dickon, the word flashing through the wold that Amende-alle was a-marching; came running, some from shires distant as Wilts and Somerset, and some travelled all night to join the Company. The great days had come again. This was the shining moment; laughing, singing, shouting—*when Adam delved and Eve span, who then was the gentleman?*

Oh yes! the Kingdom of God was at hand, and they wept to think what Tyler would have said. They had slain Wat Tyler at Smithfield, William Walworth, London's Mayor, and others of the King's escort had struck down Wat, and him trying to parley with the young Richard; but Wat's spirit had returned to lead the people. Already the men of Kent saw the heavens opening and the wonderful things that Jack had promised. No more taxes, no more tithes, no more sweating like a slave for lord or bishop (down in Wiltshire, the Company of Kent heard, the commons had just hanged a bishop, 'a wonderful covetous man'). To sleep, gentle Jesus! in a fine bed.

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White bread and brown ale for the asking. New woollen hoods and shoes of supple Spanish leather. And wenches, wenches with fiery tongues and succulent thighs. For Amende-alle was come !

Along the road, forty miles to Blackheath, a vast flaring column, ten thousand strong, with the Standards of the Hundreds going on before and the White Wolf fang-gleaming in the sun. Ankle-deep in marigold, amid murmurous fly-drowsing June, the ragged cheering boys, the old men who wept, the beggars with huge festering sores and crazy gait, hopping on crutches, hair matted with burrs—all, all trailing after the Company of Kent.¹

God thundering from pillars of fire, Canaan ahead, and on his silver horse a marvellous Moses, in glinting helmet, carrying a sword. The very last day of Creation . . . God's children in the mighty fellowship of Kent, and London again, London with golden spires and flashing red tiles, the great gates, the gleaming river, the nineteen-arch Bridge.

Oh London, we are coming !

* * * * *

While England shook to the march of the Dispossessed, Parliament like a set of queasy debtors were shunted from Blackfriars to Westminster, and finally to Leicester. Queen Margaret had never liked London ; the feeling was reciprocal. Margaret was just twenty-one. A princess of Anjou, she was proud, defiant, and beautiful. Wedded to a crowned anchorite, Henry the Sixth, Margaret now had, with Suffolk's murder, the chief burden of the House of Lancaster. Leicester, the young Queen felt, might provide a less controversial setting. But no change of scenery might alter the bitter review of 'Lancastrian misrule.' After Suffolk's beheading in an open boat, off Dover sands, in June 1450, the war party was gunning for Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset and Lieutenant in Normandy. Again, John Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, and William Tresham, Yorkist Speaker of the Commons, prepared the attack.

Margaret marked Tresham ; short, peppery, wattled—the turkey

¹ It is obvious that Richard Duke of York, by no means a Richard *Egalité*, could not countenance the abolition of tithes or the hanging of bishops. Equally clear that the peasants were taking direct action on the lines of their own conception of social reform, as in Wat Tyler's time.

cock effect of so many of York's partisans and of the strutting Duke himself. But Margaret had friends in Parliament, among them Lord Grey de Ruthyn. She discussed with a sympathetic Lord Grey the Speaker's abuse of her, his responsibility for Suffolk's murder, his present clamour against Somerset. Lord Grey promised to 'take care' of Tresham; and would do so with a dagger, later that year.

It appeared certain that with Somerset out of the way, Margaret herself would be the next target of the irreconcilables. Victory of the English in Normandy!—the vision blazed, Lancaster's failing final hope. Somerset was shut up in Caen with a mutinous garrison; three French columns under Charles the Victorious, with great parks of artillery, were driving at will through Normandy, cleaning out nests of English. Had Somerset been the Black Prince, he could not have averted ruin. Yet, was not this English doom what Queen Margaret had secretly longed for? Her enemies said as much. Brought to England by Suffolk and the peace faction, Margaret had always symbolised an end to the strife between the Kingdoms—even if that meant the English had to get out of France for good. Regnier of Anjou was writing to his daughter Margaret that it was as if Jeanne la Pucelle had come again; soon all France would be rid of the damned 'God-damns.'

In the midst of this Parliamentary fray burst the news of Cade. Margaret perceived the deadly meaning; Kent's great Captain was the climax of the threats, murders, and hurlings inspired by Richard Duke of York. The Council, headed by John Kemp, Primate of England, Cardinal-Archbishop of Canterbury and King Henry's nominee as Chancellor, called on the Staffords, Humphrey and William, cousins of His Grace of Buckingham, to put down the rising. Equipped with but a modest force, more in the nature of constabulary duty than to fight a pitched battle with a strong army, neither the Council nor the Staffords seemed to have any notion of Cade's power.

At Blackheath, outside Southwark, where Tyler had gloried and drunk deep, the gorse was fenced off into a huge camp, by night the twinkling cat's-yellow of hundreds of cook-fires, by day a flashing savannah of steel, a torrent of colour. Cade himself, as befitting the leader and thinker of so mighty an enterprise, had established his head-

quarters apart from his humble following, at the White Hart Inn, Southwark. Here, the great Captain held court, couriers coming and going, while negotiations went on with Mayor Thomas Charlton for the surrender of London. Possessed of seemingly irresistible power, Cade had already begun that policy of fencing himself off from the sources of his strength that would in the end destroy him.

Wat Tyler never made this error. Tyler was undone by the very enormity of his popular success. Wat's fatal conference with the boy-King Richard the Second at Smithfield was a miscalculation, profound in result, of the mystique of English kingship that yet remained after overwhelming humiliation of the temporal power.

For the moment, however, Cade was supreme. A servant of Sir John Fastolf's, one Payn, was caught by the rebels prowling about their camp and brought before Cade. Fastolf was military adviser to the King's Council; the mention of his name inflamed Cade. The Captain of Kent rated Payn as a horse-stealer and ordered the Herald of Exeter to make 'four Oyez at four parts of the field; proclaiming openly by the said Herald, that I was sent thither for to espy their puissance, and their habiliments of war, from the greatest traitor that was in England or in France, as the said Captain made proclamation at that time, from one Sir John Fastolf, knight, the which diminished all the garrisons of Normandy and Maine, the which was the cause of the losing of all the King's title and right of inheritance, that he had beyond the sea.'¹

The two horses, blooded mares, belonged to Fastolf; and Payn had attempted to take these horses plus some valuables of Sir John to safe-keeping at Caister Castle, Norfolk. Cade appropriated the mares; he then delivered a blast against Fastolf, the old canard of Fastolf's cowardice at the battle of Patay—the familiar line, now taken over by Richard of York to explain the English defeat in France, the beginning of a 'stab-in-the-back' legend.

Significantly, Cade said nothing about Fastolf as a landlord; nor did he dredge up any social grievances.

On June 18th, the Staffords, with King Henry close behind, reached Blackheath. Cade had evacuated his camp, ringed about with a stockade, and retreated into Kent. The Staffords pressed after, not

¹ J. Payn to John Paston, *Paston Letters*, XXX; ed. by James Gairdner.

realising that this retreat was a manœuvre to avoid being pinned down in the stockade and perhaps starved out. At Sevenoaks, the Company of Kent suddenly turned and fell upon the Staffords. The royal army was wiped out; and both commanders slain. Cade rigged himself in Sir Humphrey's gold-studded brigandine, embossed with the Stafford Knot.

Henry himself had taken the field, urged on by Queen Margaret; but the wrecks of Stafford's command streaming into Blackheath demoralised the King's array. They refused to fight, forced the surrender of Lord Say, High Treasurer, to the rebels, and melted away. Henry and Margaret fled to the fortress of Kenilworth in Warwickshire. Henry's first effort to play the Leopard in the teeth of mutiny had ended disastrously, while the Queen was but young in terror.

A change took place in Jack Cade. Heretofore, the Captain of Kent had been a man of the people, risen up to avenge their wrongs and to teach the lords a lesson. But now Jack became a lord himself. He took up his old quarters at the White Hart; and proclaimed that he was no longer Jack Cade but John Mortimer, noble cousin (though on the sinister side) to the last Earl of March, a claimant to the throne.

No plain man might get in to see Jack; in fact, it was worth a man's whole skin to be heard talking of Jack Cade, that was. Poor wights had their heads broke just for speaking the name. He that had been the most easy of fellows was now withdrawn behind a governance more rigid than that of a prince. He issued commands through Lovelace and Poynings; proclamations were cried at Blackheath by the Herald of Exeter.

To the White Hart Inn came Humphrey Duke of Buckingham, commander of the King's army, and Archbishop Kemp, the Chancellor; they were received by a seated and covered 'Sir John Mortimer' (he had recently added knighthood to his honours),¹

¹ Anne Mortimer was heiress to the Claimant and mother of Richard Duke of York. His own claim, such as it was, derived from Anne Mortimer rather than the Dukes of York. Richard II had appointed Roger Mortimer his heir; and York recognised Richard as the last rightful King. By taking the name of Mortimer, Cade verged dangerously near a claim to the throne. This, no doubt, was his intention once he had liquidated Henry. As for Richard of York, he was fairly hoist with his own petard.

consuming a pork pasty with a continually replenished mug of foaming ale at his elbow. The delegation asked 'Mortimer' what his intentions were. Wiping the suds from his mouth and shouting for the drawers to rush another growler, as Tyler had once rinsed and spat before young Richard, 'Mortimer' demanded a personal interview with King Henry. There was no more talk of the Duke of York, that fine gentleman whose heart bled for the people. Mortimer, it now appeared, had resolved to take the government on himself.

Appalled, the Chancellor and the army chief returned to Kenilworth. Mortimer prepared his state entry into London: The citizens had long since given up any idea of armed resistance and the rebels had behaved with such discipline in Southwark that Mayor Charlton himself had arranged a welcome at the Guildhall.

In gold-studded brigandine, Stafford-embossed, flashing and glittering, the Captain of Kent rode into London across the nineteen-arch Bridge on Friday, July 3rd. Rode into glory, amid frantic cheers, with agate eyes and cruel smile. Before him pranced the Sword-bearer with a gilded sword of state borne upright; and after, the Banner-bearer with the huge snarling Wolf—"old Whitey," the cowed peasants whispered—the badge of the noble House of Mortimer; and drums flaring, trumpets skirling, this was the hour of *Amende-alle*!

(But he wasn't John *Amende-alle* any more, some magic had gone out of him, and presently the frightened folk who trooped after would discover this.)

By Old St. Swithin's on Candleswick Street, the Captain of Kent struck his sword on London Stone and cried: "Now is Mortimer lord of this City!"

At the Guildhall next morning, 'Lord Mortimer' (he was continually improving in rank) thrust aside speeches of welcome; the men of Kent had work. 'Mortimer' had dragged along in the triumphal procession Sir James Fiennes, Lord Say, the High Treasurer; he now gave Lord Say a drumhead court martial on charges of having sold out to the French, with Suffolk. Say, the third royal officer to be publicly and atrociously murdered in six months, was beheaded at the Standard in Cheap. Meantime, at Mile End where Wat Tyler and young Richard had held their first conference in 'the hurling

tyme,' the Kentish men had caught Sir James Cromer, the Sheriff of Kent and a relative of the slain Treasurer. Cromer was beheaded forthwith. The two heads were placed on poles and paraded through the streets, at every corner a halt, bestial howls, and a gruesome kiss between the heads.

Mayor Charlton and his fellow officials began to have doubts. Fun was fun; but Charlton was feeling queasy about those heads. Who could say that the Kentish lads might not become fond of this sport?

At this moment, 'Mortimer' in his mad arrogance—for he had passed to a visionary world of paranoiac splendour—broke the discipline imposed by himself on the Company. A self-invited and doubtless rather trying dinner guest at Gristes House in Tower Street, 'Mortimer' requited the hospitality by plundering his host of everything movable. 'And Jacke Cade, captaine of the rebels in Kent, being by him in this his house feasted, and when he had dined, like an unkind guest, robbed him of all that was to be found worth the carriage.'¹

Later, either that day or the next, the unkind guest went to Cornhill, where he broke in 'a fayre house of olde tyme called the Grene Gate. Since the which tyme Philip Malpas, sometime Alderman and one of the Sheriffs, dwelling therein, and was there robbed and spoyled of his goods to a great value by Jacke Cade.'²

After this suicidal knavery, Mortimer withdrew across the massive London Bridge, crammed with lean-to red-roofed houses, to his headquarters in Southwark. Lord Scales, Constable of the Tower and a Lancastrian, who had been hitherto rebuffed by the Yorkist-inclined city, now saw his opportunity and offered Mayor Charlton the services of Matthew Gough, recently returned from Normandy, with several hundred archers and men-at-arms from the Tower of London, to keep out the wild bands of Kent.

That afternoon, July 6th, Mortimer found the drawbridge at the south end raised, while armed patrols swarmed the London side. Exeter's Herald sounded the alarm; the Standard of the Wolf was unfurled in the silvery river sky.

¹ Stow's *Survey of London*, ed. C. K. Kingsford, 2 vols., Oxford, 1906.

² *Ibid.*

The battle began about evensong. It went on all night, by torches and flares, lighting the green-ghastly faces of the dead and the steel flashing up and down the great Bridge. The shrieks of the wounded, trampled underfoot or pitched into the river, were lost in the roar of Tower bombards, the tongues of orange flame leaping from the battlement. Poor Payn, Fastolf's man, dragged about in 'Mortimer's' retinue, was forced into the fray. 'And then at night the Captain put me out into the battle at the Bridge, and there I was wounded, and hurt nearhand to death; and there I was six hours in the battle and might never come out thereof.'¹

Nobody knew the number of the dead. They perished obscurely, plunging into a river like a mirror of glittering flame, and were washed with the tide to Gravesend. Matthew Gough himself fell, covered with wounds; and in the red exhausted dawn, the London captains proposed a twenty-four-hour truce. The Kentish men retired to Blackheath. But while Kent's Captain drank and meditated blood, word spread that King Henry had promised pardon to all who would lay down their arms and go home.

The Great Company listened to the bishops, Kemp of Canterbury and Wainflete of Winchester, Lord Privy Seal, now guiding the King. The flame was gone; the redemption. This Moses was clayfooted, a covetous cruel braggart. The Company began to break up. 'Mortimer' perceived that the game was done; by the wall between 'Lord Mortimer' and the obscure devoted thousands, he had destroyed himself. John Amende-alle, the Captain of Kent, was a cry of resurrection; of banners out of dust. 'Lord Mortimer' was naught but the pseudo-bastard of an extinct Norman line.

The discredited deliverer, no longer even a glint in the eye of the Duke of York, asked for and received a pardon—made out in the name of 'John Mortimer.' His most pressing anxiety was for his pilfered goods; he loaded them into a wherry, to convey to Rochester. But straightway came to him the mortal news that Jack Cade had no pardon, but a mythical 'John Mortimer.' This irony on the part of the Bishops, who now dominated the Council and who by jesuitical skill had quelled the rising when the men of war had utterly failed, stirred a panic in that cold and terrible heart.

¹ Paston Letters, *op. cit.*

Who then was the Gentleman?

He abandoned his baubles, his boats, his men—those few who still kept a ruined faith in him—and fled an outlaw into Kent.

It was almost the last act.

Even a hunted wretch must eat. For a week this apparition, doomed to bear the name of Cade through eternity, wandered south-east England, a mangy beggar raiding gardens, living on roots and berries. What mighty wind of God failed here ; this pitiful scrabbling creature, on all fours, digging and chewing.

On the night of July 13th, he was scrounging a garden in Sussex when the owner, Alexander Iden, appeared. Cade put up a fight; but Iden was the better man. Only later did the Sussex squire learn that these swordstrokes were the most profitable he had ever bestowed, for a price of 1000 silver marks had been put on Jack Cade—alive or dead.

The remains came up to London, where short days ago the great Captain had swaggered and promised laws. They quartered the body and impaled the four quarters on four gates of London, while the leering crow-plucked head adorned the tallest spire of London Bridge.

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Haste, Traveller

BY ELIZABETH BERRIDGE

*Haste, Traveller, the sun is low
He shall return, but never thou.*

(from a sundial dated 1710, found in the grounds of the house)

THE dusk had brought no appreciable coolness. From the nursery window the small boy watched the trees shift together, moving in close around the house, their leaves forming a dense protective shield against the coming of darkness. An owl hooted twice from the empty barn. Across from the circular garden, beyond the yew hedge that guarded his retreat (so private that he called it 'Mr. Pog's house,' not daring to give it his own name for fear it would then have being and come to harm), further away over the fields where German prisoners had once dug ditches and where now his pony ate the sweet summer grass and huffed through her dowager's nostrils at the dancing gnats; beyond all these familiar things rose the fairy hill, encircled by Betsy's Lane, which led, a haunted path to a haunted pool, widder-shins to the next village.

Keeping his eyes on the pine-topped hill, the small boy made a sign of his own invention. He pressed his two thumbs into a straight line and above them his fingers formed the apex of a triangle. So he thought of himself, his sister and God. This sign kept safe the child asleep and sweat-damp in her cot near the window. Once, at mid-summer, he had seen a sign from God strike down from the hill, so he knew it was in answer to his own. Mad Dai the postman had told him it was so, although his father said it was only summer lightning or a falling star. He believed nothing his father told him, because no one else gave such uncomfortable answers. Mad Dai knew everything, though. He knew whom God had touched and who lay outside His mercy. A terrible thing was that both the boy's mother and father lay outside this mercy because they went to church

only three times a year, and let him play cricket on a Sunday. God had touched him and his sister, though, and the touch hadn't worn off yet because they were too small to sin, and in time Dai would take them both over the fairy hill to chapel, where true men and women worshipped and made proper stern prayers with lots of feeling and cries to the Lord who liked such things and understood the Welsh. In church, Dai said, the old organ drowned the singing—and a good thing too in a way, for everyone knew the English had no voices because they had no souls to sing with. Sad it was, poor dabs. Sad, too, Dai said, his great pale eyes looking down at him over the slung sack of letters, sad for the boy back to be half English—that way you were nothing at all, like a good rice pudding spoilt with water added, or good flour baked in a shop to a pappy town loaf.

At this memory the boy made his sign fiercely until his thumbs ached, and stared at the hill.

"Why am I only half Welsh, mam?" he had at once asked.

"Because I am Welsh, but your father is English," his mother had replied.

"So the baby is half and half too?"

"Of course. You're both lucky, you're a nice mixture."

A nice mixture! Wandering off to Mr. Pog's house, he had carefully collected three jam jars, two small, one large. Then he meticulously mixed one jam jar of water with one of mud and watched to see what happened. This was half and half. He stirred busily with a stick. This was the nice mixture then, you couldn't tell which was mud and which was water. Dai was wrong. Smiling, he idly rolled over on to his stomach to watch two ants feinting with a pine needle, urging it towards a crevice in the roots of the great weathered yew tree. Only when they had succeeded did he roll over again to taste his triumph over Dai.

He stared. What had happened? The nice mixture had gone. The water was very clear and the mud very thick on the bottom. So *that* was half and half. Glaring at the black mud he realised here was his father letting him down again. He had no right to be English and to take them all away. He supposed that London acted like a magnet to the English blood in his body. Dai had said that no one with one drop of Welsh blood could keep away from Wales, for

there were magnets in such blood that drew you back to the mountains, whatever.

Now, remembering that, he shut his eyes tightly and made a wish. The same one he had made last week, dropping his penny down St. Garmon's Well. But he'd rather trust fairies than saints any day. So he turned his eyes up to the hill and in a fierce whisper said, "Turn us all into stones, King Pendragon, and let the yew tree hide the house forever, but please, please if the furniture van comes tomorrow to take us all away to London let me come back one day."

The air was full of the milky darkness of summer, not the solid rough dark of winter, and as the boy moved to pull in his head from the open window, something seemed to shimmer down from the sky over the far hill. It was as if someone had quickly shaken out a light yellow ribbon. King Pendragon had given his sign.

* * * * *

Half a mile away a car moved bumpily along a lane. A woman's deep voice said, "Hullo, summer lightning! Steady, the bridge is round this bend past the farm."

"If we don't come to it soon, I'll begin to think the place is bewitched," a man's voice answered from the darkness of the driving seat. His companion laughed softly, as if to show she was in agreement but wanted to say nothing more. Further on, over the old wooden bridge, grey-green trees stood gappily on either side of a long, winding, badly worn carriage track over the large field. Attracted by the headlamps, the white face of a cow thrust between the trees and stayed there, suspended, moonily chewing. To their left came the snicker of a pony. A sliced lemon moon rode summer high above the dark mass that rose behind grey stone walls near an iron gate. There were no clouds. The car lights cut a swathe through the honey dark evening as they bounced slowly over ruts, scratched past squat thorn trees crouching at the last wide curve. Like the two-dimensional trees they slept at their post, unchallenging.

The girl, who looked less like one in the searching dazzle of light, opened the gate and stayed to heave the iron bar back into position as the car went on, feeling its way past a beech grove, a yew hedge, round a semi-circular gravelled drive to draw up at a paved space

before the wooden storm portico. This was the only protuberance on the face of the house, which presented a tranced, flat face to the driver as he stopped and the fussy noise of the engine died away. At once the silence of the place flowed in again, and as the girl joined him she drew a swift breath at the closeness of the trees, the sudden sharp smell of crushed camomile. She did not see a small figure draw quickly back from a window set above the porch.

"You'll love them," she said uneasily.

Her companion was delving in the back of the car, there was a clink of bottles. "Help me in with these," he said. "It doesn't matter whether I do or not. People are the same everywhere, the drink's the only thing that varies—and this time I've brought my own."

The paucity of the man hit the girl like a cold draught, but before she could fully register it, the door was thrown open. The strengthening moonlight streamed in and outlined the woman standing there; her thick red hair worn loose about her shoulders, eyes startled in a reserved, unwelcoming face. So a priestess might have appeared, disturbed at her last rites. As if to make a bridge between them, the girl called out at once, but keeping her voice low as if to waken nothing in the absolute silence.

"Jory called on me unexpectedly, Nika darling. He insisted on being allowed to come and pack up books. I've told you all about him, haven't I?"

Nika sent a long, disbelieving look across to the dark figure still scrabbling about among the clinking bottles. "Oh, hullo, Lesley," she said. "Yes, of course. Actually I expect the men will do all that tomorrow. But how nice of you—yes—do come in and cheer us on our last night." Her voice grew warmer as she spoke, it hastened on as if she needed to hear her own words before she could believe them. "Anyway, there are some books I wanted to look out for you—and I'm sure John has put aside some records you liked."

She ushered them into the hallway and then threw open a door to the left. Instantly lamplight streamed out and made the hall even higher and more shadowed. She began to talk again, as if they were very late guests at a party which took all her energy and could only be endured by determined froth. Dazed, Lesley and the unknown Jory were drawn into this queer illusion, learning that John was in his

study bundling up papers and so on, he must have heard them arrive and would be out in a moment. Oh, they'd brought drinks, how lovely, *what* a marvellous thought, she'd find some glasses if they weren't packed. . . .

The long drawing-room with its wavy oak floor and its ground length windows was lighted by one Aladdin lamp and a swinging hurricane lamp hooked on a beam. Although the next day it would be empty, Nika had crowded all the vases and containers she could find full of flowers : roses and lupins, pansies and pinks and marigolds. There were great bowls of buttercups and vetch and rosebay willow herb, and trailing garlands of Traveller's Joy. A brass can held spreading sheaves of grasses and green branches. The enormous French sofa still stood where it always had been, cutting the room in half : it gave Lesley, for private reasons, a guilty qualm.

"Everything looks so solid, so immovable. I simply can't believe they'll be in a strange house, hundreds of miles away this time to-morrow," she murmured to Jory, who was staring round with his usual undisguised curiosity, his thin eyelids blinking rapidly over small black eyes like the shutters of an immensely efficient, split second camera. He at once noted the odd effect of the massed flowers, their scents filled the air. The peppery smell of lupins balanced the sentimental wedding scent of the eglantine, while the cloves blended with the sweet heaviness of roses. Above it all breathed the fresh neutrality of the grasses and boughs. Something, hidden very deep under the cheap salesman's veneer, stirred in response and made him uneasy and excited. So had the first Druids decked their altars : he found himself looking for oak branches, and found them. But what tetchy god was Nika placating ?

Seeing Jory so enrapt, Lesley quickly stepped across the room and left it by the second door, which led to the passage near the kitchens. She wanted to find out whether the rest of the house was as undisturbed as the drawing-room. But here, in the first of the big stone-flagged kitchens, signs of change lay everywhere. Cupboards had been unsystematically cleared, witnesses to the panic of an abandoned ship : or a burglary, with the indiscriminate blind grabbing interrupted by the owner's key in the lock. Dirty linings to the drawers, a box full of half-finished sauces, tins, oddments of dried herbs, mouse-nibbled.

Behind a cupboard, half pulled from the wall, were scattered rat droppings and an old letter, evidences of the daily woman's slack ways and Nika's sleep-walking attitude to her house. This troubled Lesley, for she kept her own small cottage in perfect order; an uncared-for room affected her like a rumpled bed at noon. Over most houses cleanliness, order and polish lay like protective skins; here those skins were missing and rawness was the result. Seeing Nika rummaging through a half-cleared cupboard, Lesley thought that the occupants of such a house were raw too, as raw and defenceless as disorder could make them. But she said nothing, only wiping glasses as Nika found them and putting them on a black japanned tray with a crystal jug of water. As she carried the tray out and along the passage she said simply,

"You have some lovely things, Nika, I hope they won't get damaged tomorrow."

Nika understood the unspoken meaning. Yes, she should take more care: she had some lovely things, that was true. But they were just things. On impulse she pressed Lesley's arm and said, "Why don't you come up with us tomorrow and see they don't come to any harm? It's another house that's far too big for us, so there'll be plenty of room." She could have jammed the words back even as they formed, even as Lesley's face took on the luminous quality of pleasure. Unable to stop herself she went on, "It would be a change for you, and a huge help to us. Besides, you're the only one of our friends John doesn't hate having about the house."

I should have been a flagellant, she thought coldly, as she held open the door with an anticipatory smile. John was standing by the window, dwarfed by beech branches, talking in his usual easy and charming manner. For a moment she hated his sense of occasion: indeed, although he was unaware of it, the occasion had this time passed him by and left him a blind outsider. As Lesley went straight up to him, no doubt to tell him of his wife's invitation, Nika, aware of her own bad manners, quietly poured herself a large glass of sherry and left the room without a word.

She stood in the stone-floored passage with relief, and shut her eyes. As she relaxed, she became gradually aware of a disembodied tension, nothing at all to do with the complications she had just created by

her hateful, rash invitation. The house itself seemed to be giving out shudders of protest, as if too many pieces of heavy furniture : beds, sideboards, chests, had been pushed over its sagging oak floors, its enduring tiles, for too many years. Sighing and whimpering in its sleep, as restless as the small boy upstairs who beat with the same pulse, the house creaked and stirred. It was no new thing, this curious silent pull, only the troubled tension was unfamiliar. She knew the current moved, as insistent and unremarked as an undertone, past many shut doors, up the perfect curve of the honey-coloured stairs, along moonlit passages, and up that final flight of all, that led past the plain deal door with the pictures of a lost king and queen pinned on to it. Behind this were the five hollow attics. Up there, from ancient beams hung the mummified bats, their brittle dirt fouling the small Victorian shellhouses made by some child long ago ; now crumbling and flaking like the miniature paper cut-outs that still peopled them. Up there was the extreme dryness of old age, the smell of stale lavender and wrinkled apples, of life in retreat ; silence and dust. Cobwebbed moonlight, pale and furtive and insubstantial, poured thinly into four of the attics. The fifth was sealed off, no one had ever been in it. But at that moment the small boy, who knew the attics better than his parents, walked there in a dream. He was afraid and joyfully hugging his fear, because it was innocent. Behind the wall the unknown room—the walls melted, there hung a skeleton, his own. There he was, forever immured. In a dream shout he cried " I'm here ! It's me, in the hidden attic ! " But the searchers passed by, walking stealthily outside the walls, up and down, hollowly, acting out the dream of the house. The white moonlight on his face roused him, he started up in bed wide awake, but it was a dream he was never to forget, a dream that took his heart away and hid it for many years in the sealed attic high above the fields and rooms and grown-ups, and kept it safely sealed, mummified like the bats, until years later, just in time, he was to come to claim it back.

Downstairs his mother shivered. Some fibre of her own being had been touched as the boy sweated out his dream. Now she moved along the dark passage to the children's playroom, and was astonished at the whiteness and strength of the summer night flooding in as she opened the door. The curtains had been taken down and the windows

had a bare and shabby look. So had the abandoned toys and tattered books that lay cruelly illuminated. Dolls all but torn to pieces lay in a broken wheelbarrow. For the first time Nika knew what it was like to leave this house, and the agony cut so deep that she bent double as if seized with a stitch. She gulped her sherry and reached blindly up on the shelves above the fireplace for matches. For a moment she stopped to drain the glass and was immediately lightheaded, for she had eaten nothing all day. She set fire to the mess of papers and cardboard that lay in the grate. As if to kill the pain she felt by adding to it, she took up armfuls of books and threw them on, with legless rag dolls, cut-outs she had laboured over on rainy afternoons with her son—the beginnings of a puppet theatre, made out of cereal packets. Dolls' furniture conjured from acorns and conkers, with pin legs and woven backs to the tiny wobbly chairs. Violence matched the violence done earlier to these small toys, she was possessed by the need to tear and rend; the strange unease of the house seemed to gather intensity about her, as if this was what it demanded. To her the fire became terrifying, became the destructiveness of inquisition, and further back into time than that—a great sacrificial consuming. Consume, *consummatum est*. A doll's face met her tipsy gaze, one she had stitched and painted herself, it writhed free of the flames, blue eyes starting, curls charred before it collapsed into the yellow triumphant roar.

Nika gave a shout of pain. Unlike her son's dream-shout, it was heard. Lying awake after his startling dream, heart pounding, the boy heard it, but it came to him like a physical pain, a summons to action rather than a sound. He flung back the sheet and quietly left the room, treating the moonlit patches of floor like puddles, either tiptoeing through or carefully skirting them. Unerringly he turned down the passage at the bottom of the stairs, led by the crackle of paper and the acrid smell of smoke. For a moment he stood amazed in the doorway of the playroom, his great dark eyes seeing his mother wildly poking the fire with the broken handle of his green wheelbarrow.

"You children break and destroy everything you're given! I can't take all this rubbish with us—"

Her guilty, angry words belied her expression. The boy thought

he had never seen anything in the world as sad as his mother's face. It was too sad even to make him cry. Then something exploded inside the doll, writhing in the flames. Some small unexpected burst of air eddied round the stuffing and he cried out then in a voice that echoed all loss, all fear, "Where's Mr. Pog?"

At this, Nika at once came to herself. She knelt down and clasped her arms round his waist. In her ordinary, gentle voice she said, "He's upstairs, of course. Isn't he in bed with you?"

"No! He was too hot, and said he'd sleep on the floor. I forgot him. I thought——"

"Darling! I would never, never, come into your room and take anything of yours! Mr. Pog is one of the family, anyway." She bunched up her hand and rubbed it against his stiff cheek, trying to make him smile, but even speech was difficult for him. To his added horror, for the first time in his life he saw his mother cry. She let the tears roll down her cheeks as she knelt, and then wiped her face with his pyjama jacket. This was horrible; also her breath smelt queer and sharp. She said unsteadily, "Look, bach, you can see I've only burnt the things you put aside yourself. You *said* they were broken. Oh, as if I'd come creeping in and——"

"You've left a bit of the theatre," said the boy coldly, and started to gather up the fragments of scenery and cardboard characters that still littered the floor. Robin Hood, Little John, part of the green-wood tree. Methodically he collected them and threw them on the fire, watching his mother sharply as he did so. Silently they finished off the pile, and he pounced on a toy trumpet he had won at some village fête, blew it experimentally and tucked it away in his pocket. "I'll keep this for the baby."

"Let me take you up to bed," said Nika at last, and bent to lift him. At once he said, "You're not coming back in here again, are you? It's all finished now?"

She shook her head, then carried him up the stairs, murmuring words that didn't make sense even to her, in her adult world where words meant not one thing, but several things at once.

"You see, one can't stay in the same place all one's life. The time comes to move on and some things have to be left behind—you go into a new house and somehow new things get added on to you and

there's no room for the old ones. You know how a caterpillar eats its way out of its old skin, oh lots of times . . ." She opened the bedroom door awkwardly with a push of her elbow, for he was heavy and she was not in the habit of carrying him. Half-listening, he noted tiredly that she trod right through the moonlight puddles as if she didn't know they were there. She didn't know everything.

As she straightened out the wrinkled and kicked about bedclothes, she breathed comfort gently over him. "But it doesn't stop you remembering." Scarcely looking at her, he twisted away and scabbled under the bed, bringing up a small white fur bear, with its eyes sewn crookedly. Nika had made it for him long ago; this was Mr. Pog. He hid it rapidly under the clothes, smiled at his mother, and was suddenly asleep. As the smile faded a disappointed crossness pouted his lips, as if a doubt he could not communicate had entered his mind. Sighing, she went across to the cot where her fat daughter lay in untroubled oblivion, one podgy acquisitive hand clutching a mauled-looking rabbit. She was wet. Nika changed her, powdered her, smoothed the pillow and put on a fresh undersheet. Her tension relaxed as she worked swiftly, dexterously; always, looking at her daughter's full Etruscan mouth, she felt a corresponding surge of gaiety and indulgence. She drew the curtains, so that the moon would not harm them with its seeking fingers, and softly left the room.

As she went slowly, heavily downstairs, letting her hand slip along the baluster rail, the moonlight contoured her head with a shining reddish mist. To Jory, waiting for her in the hall, a full glass in each hand, it looked as if she were crowned with living fire.

"I've been looking for you," he said. He did not say that his curiosity had led him into the empty playroom, with its dying pyre.

For a moment she did not remember who he was; then, her mind still caught by her children, she saw a link which led her to the name Jory. (Odd for a Welshman, that name.) His mouth was the grown-up version of the baby one in the cot; here, in the summer-lit hall, it was tilted up, boldly curved, full of dark sensuality and easy laughter. Soft-moving, small, dark—what did he do? A traveller in something or other, used to the queer things people did? His forte—so Lesley had told her—was understanding women. No doubt it was the transitoriness of their relationship that made it so

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successful, for her cottage was a halfway call for him between Bar-mouth and Chester. Nika supposed he might have the magic of the medieval pedlar about him, springing up suddenly with gifts and knowing the value of a quick and mysterious disappearance. Here he was now with a gift, and descending the last stair, she gratefully took the proffered glass.

"They're looking out records. Come on." Insinuating a small, deft hand under her elbow he started to lead her across the hall. From the direction of the drawing-room came the strains of a blues, and the chatter of drums. It was impossible to dance to it, but Jory took the opportunity of sliding his arm round her waist and fitting some eccentric steps of his own. He caught up a small lamp, and holding it high in one hand, the glass in the other, he moved easily across the floor with Nika. Laughing a little, she opened the drawing-room door, and they swept through to the smell of flowers.

Lesley was lying full length on the rug in front of the empty fireplace sorting records, John was beside her, crouching, his hand on her nape, and they too were silent. To Nika's raw apprehension they seemed enclosed in a private cocoon of effortless intimacy. Lesley looked up. "Heavens, what a ritual couple you are, with that lamp and the sherry glass. Jory, *must* you play at being the light of the world? Do put it down and give me some Dubonnet, well-laced, please."

John said nothing, scarcely glanced at his wife. He seemed absolutely locked away, methodically dusting and setting aside records. Then he uncoiled himself and went to the old portable gramophone, wound it and put on another blues. "Early Ellington," he ventured briefly and went back to crouch on the rug beside Lesley. Her great dark eyes drank him in as greedily as her mouth took the Dubonnet. Almost at once, a deep negro voice breathed out:

*"Saddest tale that ever was told
On land or sea
Was the tale they told
When they told the truth on me."*

At once the deep pained cry of the saxophone took over and a marvellously melancholy noise filled the room. It was as if some

distilled, cynical sorrow had been exactly translated into music. Nika tilted her glass and let a few drops of wine fall to the floor. Jory caught her eye and clasped her again, surely, and without permission. They moved round the room in the same nerveless embrace. Over his shoulder Nika saw John just as close to Lesley, although they had made no perceptible move towards each other, enmeshed in their own listening silence. She knew they were all caught, all four of them, caught and held tranced in some ritual demanded of them by the house before they abandoned it for ever.

Jory manœuvred her through the door and again they danced in the hall. Their footsteps made little noise, only a quiet shuffling, and when the record died with the repeated melancholy fall of words, they still moved in the same compulsive way. An old waltz followed, and their feet automatically conformed to the new rhythm; Jory's mouth moved, soft as a moth, on to Nika's, and in a kiss that was not a kiss but a completion of this purely trance-like fusing, they swung round and round as one person. It was as if at last the moving currents Nika had sensed had swept into them, for together they moved in and out of rooms dumb with moonlight, frozen in disorder. From time to time the music stopped and then started again, with sometimes a violin, sometimes a saxophone, sometimes a voice to act as the leading thread in the maze they found themselves. Their steps quickened or slowed as, like swans in a death dance, they whirled compulsively on.

At last, exhausted, they reached the stairs again, and collapsed separately, softly, on to the third one up where the wide curve began and the wall supported their backs comfortably. The music stopped. In an effort to emphasise their return to a norm of behaviour, Jory lit two cigarettes and handed Nika one. He felt altogether unlike himself, and yet this did not make him uneasy. There was no sexual challenge in the young woman who fitted so flexibly into the corner of the stairs beside him. He felt curious about her, oddly anxious for her well-being.

"Have you been happy here? It's strange Lesley never brought me over before, she's talked quite a lot about you both."

Nika laughed lazily. "I expect she told you John and I were slowly devouring each other, like a snake its tail. She thinks the

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country is too big for us—and she's right, of course. It demands the sort of discipline we're not willing to accept."

"I asked whether you'd been happy," Jory reminded her. "But you make it sound as if not. Funny, I don't associate you with a failure of that sort. I should have thought—whatever else you may not be able to do—" remembering Lesley's impatient dismissal of Nika as a housewife—"you'd have made a success of living."

"Jory, you're nice to say that." She pressed his hand, asked him to bring over an ugly vase that stood with several brass candlesticks on a small table near them. "We'll use this as an ashtray, I don't want to burn the stairs." They were talking in whispers, as if listeners were near, and she repeated his words with a desperate honesty, as if they must be exactly defined. "Have we been happy here? That's a curious word, happiness, I've always wondered exactly what it means. John and I have had an extraordinary sense of being fully alive, but in another world. Like airmen who fly right above the clouds and exist in that timeless bright space with all normal contacts suspended. Godlike. Elated. Free. Divers get it when they go down too deep . . . what's it called?"

"*L'ivresse des grandes profondeurs*. It's nitrogen poisoning, really. A kind of drunken ecstasy with no hangover."

"But a kind of concentrated happiness, surely!" After a pause she went on, "The boy's been happy. Oh, too much so. Nothing will ever come up to it again for him—he's more the child of this house than our child. He flows with it. It's watched and listened and shared him, even more than it has us. What's that?"

"Only a fox barking. Quite near too. What beautiful hair you have."

She stared solemnly at him, pushing her hand up and through the flung silky mass, pulling it round her face, like a small animal hunching itself into its furry shoulders. It occurred to Jory that she was more aware of her hair than any other woman he had met. Was it because it was the only arresting thing about her—her one claim to an unusual beauty? The extreme loveliness of it, the colour, quantity and texture denied her any other pretensions. It threw into sharp relief the earnest set of her pale features and when she scraped it back, as she did now, he saw with appreciation one other perfection, the long

sweep of her jawline which ended under a delicately set ear. It seemed an act of homage to bend his lips to it. But she drew away almost automatically, as if nothing could be allowed to interrupt her introspective questioning. He half-listened to her soft voice, and through it he heard the muted music from behind the closed door of the drawing room, the creaking of old wood, and once more the sharp yelp of a fox. It's very near; something's scared it, he thought. The full tide of moonlight poured down the stairs from a window set somewhere above them, but still they were deep in the shadow.

"We've been living someone else's dream for eight years," she was saying, and Jory understood this dream. He had the sudden feeling that he too was caught up, possessed, as if something was whispering, "You are mine, and if you remember nothing else, you will remember this night—but for no reason of your own, no conquest." This was a night that had no beginning—he could scarcely remember driving here—and no end. The dawn would never come.

She was saying, "I suppose in an odd way we'll always be here now, like the others before us. The next people who come will have us listening and watching and sharing . . ." She stirred beside him and said sharply, "Jory, I'm afraid."

"What of?"

She made a helpless gesture with her hands in her lap. With an effort she said, "There's something else to be done."

Remembering the votive flowers, the leaping fire in the playroom, the spilling of the wine, he said out of his own dark Welsh past, "But what?"

"I don't know. There was a day last summer, you see. From early dawn it was like today. The sun poured down, and we took our lunch up on the hill above the house. It was so drowsy and hot—somehow expectant. The boy thought he'd see fairies, that kind of a day . . . all the normal sounds drifted up to us; lovely un-urgent country noises, harvesting, milking, and a sort of exhausted birdsong, but no birds in sight. And all the time there was the house below, drinking in the heat after that awful winter. From where we sat we could see the windows flashing out messages, warning us not to be away too long—"

Jory stirred with a soft grunt of indulgent laughter.

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"Very fanciful."

"Yes, I suppose so. But in the evening the awful thing happened. We went down the hill rather groggily, a bit drunk with the sun, and old Mr. Williams met us and said that young Gwillim was dead. He was the youngest boy of the farmer who rents the land from us . . . he'd been working in the heat and then drank some ice-cold water from the pump round by the stables and dropped down dead."

"I thought that was an old wives' tale."

"It is, and they're right. He was lying on the straw heap in the barn. He was only fifteen."

"But that could happen anywhere, at any time. I don't see . . ."

"No," said Nika, in a tired, idle voice, "why should you? It's just that the place is full of hidden violence. All those old Border battles, treachery and murder. The land's steeped in it. Summer visitors come and say how marvellous it is, but they don't know that in the worst winters farmers have to shoot their stock rather than let them starve, and inconvenient newborn babies are still smothered in outside privies and old women up in the hills are worn out with work and go in deadly fear of their husbands. . . ."

"For God's sake! Those things happen every day in big towns. You speak as if there were a special curse on this valley! You forget I'm Welsh too, although I wasn't brought up in the wildest part of Wales. Those things can happen anywhere." Violently he said. "The trouble with you is that you're beginning to believe the Romantic Celt label stuck on us by the English."

Nika stretched her arms wide. "Oh, I'm tired out, but let's dance again! Never mind, Jory, it doesn't concern us now. We're running away from it. London will soon knock the celt off the gingerbread."

Jory stood up, and pulled her to her feet. Restively, to hide his deep disturbance, he said, "They're very quiet in there."

"Do you mind? I don't. They're lost too, like us, but they don't know why. Let them have their lovely emotional last evening. Lesley will tell John she couldn't bear to come with us to London, it wouldn't be fair to me, and John will give her a pile of records they've been playing this evening, especially that one that goes, *Saddest tale on land or sea*, how does it go? dum, dum, dum, *the truth about me*? What is the truth about Lesley, I wonder, and does it

really matter?" Nika threw back her head and laughed with such fierce gaiety that Jory dropped his arms and stood, hypnotised by such a passionless acceptance. At that moment the rusty jangling of the door bell cut through some inspired New Orleans trumpet playing.

Before they could move, before the echoes had died away, the bell jangled again. This time the trumpet stopped abruptly and a moment later John opened the drawing-room door and stood there, looking at them. He was flushed, like a child startled from sleep. Nika went across the hall and threw open the front door as if to welcome the disaster she feared was waiting outside.

The old man who stood there was very tall, his shadow cut sharp as a knife over the floor. Although they were almost blinded by the moon which now stood directly above the house, they could sense the exaltation on his face. Like a prophet he held up his right hand, and from it dangled the body of a young vixen. Blood dripped from its delicate snout on to the patterned stones of the storm porch. It was obvious that life had only been recently battered out of it. He spoke directly to Nika.

"The missus said I was to come and show her to you right away, m'm," he said. "It's late, but we could hear you right enough. It's this fox that's been botherin' us. . . ."

"A long time," Nika murmured. "But, oh she's beautiful! What a shame. How did you catch her?"

"In my trap by the hen run. She's that cunning. I wonder you didn't hear her yelpin' and cryin'. Caught by the foreleg she was, and I nearly let her stay there, but she'd have gnawed herself free by morning. I had to belt her over the head." He looked at the crushed skull fondly. "Proper little madam, an't she?"

"What about her mate?"

"Gittins shot him last week. We're well rid of 'em. Ay, the Lord's good, as our Dai says. 'Catch us the little foxes,' he says to me. 'It's the Lord's word.'" He threw back his head in soundless and toothless laughter.

John was staring at him with disgust.

"I'd offer you a drink on it, Mr. Williams, if I didn't know you spurned the fruit of the vineyard for whose sake you destroy the little foxes."

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Surprised and abashed by the English heathen's familiarity with the Bible, Mr. Williams' mouth opened and shut silently. Nika came to his rescue.

"Well, tell your wife I understand, and we're both very pleased, do believe that. We'll see you in the morning, before we go."

Mr. Williams looked at the sky. "Dawn won't be long, missus. I'll be to bed. The missus don't give me no peace till I brought this to you. Terrible excited she was. No harm, we heard you round the back." He gave John an indignant, unsure nod. "Goodnight, boss," he said. "Goodnight, all." As he went off he seemed to be having a fierce debate with himself, and to ease his right arm, cradled the dead vixen like a child. The brush shone reddish-silver in the moonlight. Oddly, Jory caught the same sheen on Nika's hair. Above them, wakened by the noise, a child's face peered from an upper window. The boy saw the dead fox and gave a loud cry.

"I'll go up," said John, "for God's sake make us some coffee, Nika. And can't we run to sandwiches? I'm starving."

He ran upstairs two at a time, and into the nursery.

"Dai said his da would catch the fox," said the small boy as his father came into the room. "Was it the vixen?"

"Yes, it was." John sat on his son's bed and, for want of something to do, shook the hot and crumpled pillow.

"But I saw her with her cubs yesterday, up in the hills. What will happen to them?"

"If they're old enough they'll live, son. If not, they'll die. How old do you think they were?"

The boy rolled his head from side to side as tears spurted down his cheeks. "Too little! They're too little!" he sobbed out suddenly.

John reached out and held him to his side. *Take us the little foxes*, he thought savagely. Life in the country was all destruction, death in the country was truer. He longed for morning to come. A last dawn in this cursedly lovely house which had never let him work, this hated valley which spurned him, and which he could never understand. Within hours the great furniture van would lumber slowly up, and by this time tomorrow they would all be in the blessed anonymity of London. Life in the centre of the machine. The

Haste, Traveller

shouting hoardings, the acrid smoke of Paddington Station. Great red buses and lamplight in the Thames. No time to think, except along accepted grooves and among people tailored by the atmosphere, worn smooth by friction against each other. Not hard and knobbly, full of cruelty and conscience and old-testament damnation.

The boy lay quiet against him. For the first time he recognised the truth in his father's uncomfortable answers. He dared one more question.

"Shall we ever come back?"

"You will," said John. "Oh, yes, you will, son. But not me. Ever."

* * * * *

Downstairs in the kitchen Jory stopped for a moment as he fumbled for a lost tin of something for sandwiches. He whispered one word in Nika's ear.

"*Heddwch*?"

She nodded. *Heddwch*. Yes, at last it was peace. Now the dawn could come.

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